

S E R M O N S

O N

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

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CAREFULLY CORRECTED FROM THE AUTHOR'S
MANUSCRIPT, BY

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I N T W O V O L U M E S.

T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N.

V O L U M E I.

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VARIOUS SUBJECTS

THE LATE

JOHN T. ARTHUR, M.A.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT will not be improper to acquaint the reader, that the author of the following sermons did not compose them with a view to their publication. So far from it, that the greater part of them had been so hastily written, that the copies were in many places scarce legible, and some of the best of them in the judgment of the publishers, which they could not refuse a place in this collection, either had been left unfinished at first, or have been mutilated since by accident. These however they choose to lay before the public, in the condition in which they found them,

rather than by supplying such defects, to use what they thought an undue liberty with their deceased friend, whose manner and sentiments were very much his own. The only merit they claim is the arrangement of them, and the correction of some trifling negligences in the language. Whether they have done right in publishing them, the public itself will judge. The best apology they have to offer, is their own persuasion that these discourses, with all their imperfections, have great merit, and may be of considerable use.

Mr. Farquhar's character they need not here attempt to delineate. To the judicious and attentive reader such an attempt would be unne-

cessary. He will discover it in these volumes very strongly marked. Never did any performance exhibit a more genuine transcript of the disposition and sentiments of its author, than this does of the disposition and sentiments of that valuable and amiable man. It is much to be regretted, that it had not the advantage of his own correction and review. But as it is, and with all the inequality in respect of composition, that may be observed in these sermons, a good judge will not be at a loss to discern in the preacher an eminent clearness of apprehension, correctness of taste, a lively imagination, and delicate sensibility to all the finest feelings of which human nature is susceptible.

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S E R M O N I.

I T H E S S. v. 16.

Rejoice evermore.

MAny of the enemies of religion consider it as the cause of a severe, gloomy, and unsocial disposition. Some of the friends of religion seem to consider it in the same light. Nothing however can be more unjust than such a judgment, or productive of worse effects. Who would choose to dwell with sourness and severity? or what human creature is able to resist the smile of chearfulness, and the voice of joy? If religion were such as it is sometimes represented by prejudice, or such as the manners of some men who pretend to be religious, yea, I will add, who have strong feelings of religion, would indicate it to be, I should not be surprized

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B

that it had few votaries, and that men delayed to embrace it till the common feelings of humanity had left them.

Wherever a religion of this cast has been framed, I am persuaded it is not the religion of the New Testament: nor do I think, if it were, that any arguments would be sufficient for establishing it, or any further reasoning necessary for overthrowing it. But with regard to that religion, the aspersions, from whatever quarter it has arisen, is entirely groundless. Christianity, on the contrary, is the source of the best, the purest, and the most permanent joys in human life. Were there nothing more than the exhortation in the text, it would never be pretended surely that the religion of Jesus forbids all joy and cheerfulness. And it may be of importance at this time to enquire into the causes of that joy which christianity encourages and promotes, and to which the apostle exhorts us in the text.

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To give a particular account of the nature of that joy which the persuasion and practice of christianity excites, would be to describe the different modifications of rational pleasure and satisfaction; a description which at present I decline. I shall only observe, that when I speak of this joy, I cannot be supposed to mean a childish and laughing levity of disposition, which may brighten up the countenance, but does no more at best than play round the heart. I always understand by it that joy which becomes a man, which consists in a chearful but composed temper, which leaves a person open to every gratification that is agreeable in possession, and afterwards delightful on reflection. Let us enquire into the causes from which this joy proceeds. This enquiry, with some reflections to which it will naturally give occasion, will be sufficient subject for our discourse at this time. *Rejoice always, or evermore, saith the apostle.* The grounds upon which so permanent a joy is founded must be very permanent, and must be laid deep in the human mind. Let

us endeavour as plainly and as distinctly as possible to explain them.

In the first place: The joy to which christian is called, and which may indeed be reckoned his portion, results from that virtue and integrity of life which the rules of his religion require.

It might be thought almost superfluous to shew that the Christian religion is intended to make men better or more upright. The gospel was evidently given to *teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world^a.* That this is the design of it, the tendency of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, the nature of its motives, the example of its Author, sufficiently evince. Some men may be so corrupt as to try to explain away this truth: but scarcely any man can be so audacious as barefacedly to deny it.

^a Titus ii. 12.

As christianity is thus evidently intended and calculated to make men better, I further observe, that the exhortation in the text is addressed to those upon whom it had this effect. The Thessalonians were remarkable for their *work of faith*, their *labour of love*, and their *patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ*^b. They are recorded as *ensamples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia*^c. Timotheus brings the apostle *good tidings of their faith and their charity*; and the text is immediately preceded by an exhortation ever to *follow that which is good, both among themselves and all men*. It is manifest that exhortations of a general nature can only be applied to such as embrace in good earnest the tenets of that system where such exhortations are found.

Virtue and integrity therefore being essentials to the character of a Christian, whatever results naturally from these qualities belongs to him. But these qualities

^b 1 Thess. i. 3.

^c Verse 7.

are the natural source of inward peace and joy of heart. Benevolence, moderation, friendship, sincerity, from the very constitution of the human mind infuse a pleasing cheerfulness and serenity into the soul. Rancour, violence, enmity, falseness, disturb its tranquillity. They occasion storms and tempests which are always unpleasant, and often disastrous. Justice, generosity, charity, are confessed by an open, composed frankness of countenance and manners. Injustice, cruelty, suspicion and slander, are indicated by a dark look and discontented manner, or by those tumults of passion which distort the face and wring the heart. Temperance and sobriety bestow health and vigour upon their votaries. The contrary vices every one discerns in the meagre and extenuated form of that man who, after innumerable pains and sufferings, is forced, through mere old age, to relinquish life at forty. This, my brethren, is the natural and general course of things. Such are the laws impressed upon our constitution by that omnipotent Being who giveth lustre

SERMON I.

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and beauty to the sun, and regulateth the wind and the waves. By his appointment, peace and joy are the offspring of virtue. In the language of scripture, *the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever^a*, whereas the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt^c.

Consider with yourselves and tell me, when was it that you possessed a degree of joy which you can reflect upon at this moment with delight? was it not when you performed some action which your consciences approved of and applauded you for? When is it that you feel a conflict within your own breasts, the sensations of uneasiness and disquiet which deprive you of solid satisfaction, and unfit you for every valuable gratification? Honestly confess the truth, Is it not when any irregular passion or appetite has got the dominion over you, and hurries you precipitately to some indulgence

^a Isaiah xxxii. 17.

^c Chap. lvii. 20.

which your heart condemns? upon whom do the monsters of horror, remorse, and despondency prey? and who are they that should dread their power, and tremble lest they feel their tyranny? do not these monsters dwell in the innermost recesses of the cave of vice? and does it not require all her sorcery to prevent their appearance at the very entry of it? On the other hand; whose mind is calm and equable like the unruffled ocean? who can allay the natural thirst of his soul at the fountain of happiness? who can trace the footsteps of peace and serenity, and tread in them? Is it not the man in whose mind conscience presides as a judge, whose life it regulates as a guide, the periods of whose existence are filled up with every act of equity, meekness, charity, condescension, and compassion, which his circumstances require or permit? Does justice leave a sting behind it? or does it occasion a triumph? does the tear of sympathy, like the tear of disappointment in a vicious pursuit, rankle the soul? or does it not rather compose

and soothe it? does the abstemiousness of temperance sicken the heart, like the cup of drunkenness? do the gifts of generosity produce those anxieties which ever prey upon the avaricious?

Take the matter in another light. Did you ever dwell in the house with any man who was unjust, or malicious, or envious, or debauched; and could you say of such a man, that you generally found him chearful, serene, and happy? that the day flowed on with an equal tenor, and that he saw morning, noon, and night with the same temper? (I speak at present merely as to this world, and a man's immediate feelings.) It is impossible in the nature of things. Who are they that most evidently display their serenity and chearfulness to their servants, their domestics, their dependants, and their connections? Is it not the virtuous and the temperate? Hail sacred Virtue, thou parent of peace and of joy! let me ever bow at thy shrine, and ever venerate thy power.

I derive, therefore, the first cause of that joy, which the religious possess, from their conforming to the laws of virtue and integrity, which are the laws of their nature. A machine cannot move easily if some of the principal springs are weakened or obstructed. An inferior animal cannot be happy if its appetite for food is not gratified, or if it is restrained from yielding to any of its strongest instincts. Neither can man, in whose constitution the sense and approbation of virtue are interwoven by the hand of his Maker, if he gives himself up to be the servant of sin.

I enter at present into no laboured or particular disquisition about the nature of virtue. Who does not perceive and feel it? who does not approve it in his neighbour? who does not admire it, in the example of Jesus? whose heart is not warmed with the inforcement and illustration of it in his precepts and parables? Alas! did we but act suitably to our knowledge and our feelings, how many saints would there

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be amongst us, and how universally would happiness be diffused!

But I acknowledge that the joy which a virtuous practice inspires, if it were all that the christian were heir to, would, in the present state of things, be at the best but interrupted and imperfect. The present scene is various and complicated. The natural tendency of things is often obstructed. With respect to human characters and enjoyments, effects are often observed that are contrary to what might have been expected. It might bear a dispute whether, if there was no world after this, good spirits, a healthy constitution of body, with strong propensities to vice, accompanied with the natural feelings of remorse when these last are indulged, were not preferable to a sickly frame, with delicate perceptions of virtue, and ardent desires to practise it, accompanied with all the disappointments which the experience of the world teaches every man to look for. All the serenity that virtue can of itself bestow

may be greatly ruffled by adversity. It may be destroyed by misfortunes. We may affirm that joy is the first-born of virtue, and that she would in the paradisaical state have been an inseparable attendant upon her mother, but that the storms and tempests of human life, in this degenerate state, often disunite those who were designed for perpetual associates.

Again, other creatures seem to be totally occupied with the present hour, and engrossed by the particular pains or pleasures which they feel; but man is a being of a different kind. His hopes and fears, his wishes and apprehensions enlarge immensely the sphere of his happiness or misery. Numberless objects offer themselves to his contemplation; and the exercise of his understanding becomes a source of pleasure or of pain to him. Suitable to the dignity and extent of his powers are the inlets of his joys and sorrows. It is religion alone that is able fully to supply the former, and alleviate the latter: and attention to this

S E R M O N I. 15

subject will convince us that the exhortation, *Rejoice evermore*, can only be addressed with propriety to the person who believes in religion. For I would observe in the second place, that a belief in the existence of an almighty, all-wise; benevolent being, and in his righteous government of the world, affords a genuine and rational pleasure to the human heart.

This belief is the foundation and groundwork of religion. For every one *that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*^f. How comfortless should we be if we knew neither whence we sprung, nor how we are supported, if we never regarded the hand that bestows our blessings, nor derived consolation under misfortunes from the reflection that every thing is regulated by unerring wisdom! If the sun did not illuminate the world, if his beams did not revive and quicken both the animal and vegetable creation, how dreary a wil-

^f Heb. vi. 6.

derness would this earth appear! But it is the observation of a heathen, that it would be less irksome and melancholy, if the sun were extinguished, than if men lived without any thought or persuasion of a supreme being and a directing providence. The consideration of these truths elevates the mind, composes the tumultuous, and restrains the disorderly passions, and fills the soul with a kind of sacred rapture. *The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice, and the isles thereof be glad^s. Because the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him^h.* Such sentiments correspond to our natural feelings. They do not force their way to the heart, but they meet with an easy and grateful reception. In the most perilous state of human life the good man adopts the language of David: *God is our refuge and strength, therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed; and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, tho^r*

^s Psalm xcvi. 1.

^h Rev. xix. 7.

*the mountains shake with the swelling thereof*¹. Consider the joys of the wicked, and observe upon what frivolous causes they depend. Their mirth generally arises from full health, good spirits, pleasant company, thoughtless security, much liquor, prosperous affairs, and such like circumstances. An alteration happens in these. Their health is disordered, their pulse becomes quick and intermitting, their spirits flag, their affairs decline, their friends desert them, their consciences are roused. Such things will often happen. Alas, what paleness seizes the ruddy cheek! with what alarms do their hearts tremble! what despondence in the down-cast eye! what tremulous agitation in the feeble joints! They have laid up no provision for this tremendous hour. They never thought that their sun would set: and he hath withdrawn his beams, and left them in an unknown, bleak and desert country. But tell me in what state of life can a good man be placed, wherein a persuasion of a supreme

¹ Psalm xliii. 1, 2, 3:

being, and a conviction of his righteous and wise administration, will not afford him joy and consolation? In youth and old age, in health and sickness, in prosperity and adversity, they are suitable and supporting subjects of meditation.

In the third place: The representation which religion gives us of the nature of our present state and of the immortality of our souls, infuses pleasure and hope into the mind. Amidst the struggles of human life, a good man looks forward to a better world with pleasing expectation.

We are taught by religion, that the present life is a state of trial and discipline, that we are placed here to act a certain part which will be attended with consequences of the utmost duration and highest importance. Without the knowledge and conviction of these truths, what joy could we expect to possess? If we were of a serious and thoughtful temper, and had only hope in this life, we should be of all creatures

the most miserable. On the other hand, the man who should run a perpetual round of dissipation and folly, whose views were not extended beyond the fleeting term of human life, whose imagination never soared above that spot of ground on which he trode, though he might eat, and drink, and laugh, and dance, and be merry, I should have no hesitation to pronounce that he was yet a stranger to the pleasures that are worthy of a reasonable being.

Early in life we are apt to look upon this world as a very pleasant theatre; upon which we may act a short but mirthful part. We are ready to say, Let us rejoice in the days of our youth; but we have not proceeded far till we meet with many things to make us sober and thoughtful. We perceive an evident disproportion between the pleasures of folly and the powers of a man, and we seek about for something to support a disappointed, doubting, anxious mind. This is only to be found in religion. Religion teaches us that our

business is important ; but that the proper discharge of it will be attended with the most beneficial consequences. It discovers that there is a part allotted us suitable to our faculties, and an exercise worthy of that nature which is bestowed on us. Under these views we cannot fold our hands in idleness, nor weep because we have nothing to do. Religion, whilst it consecrates a regular, decent and inoffensive behaviour, prescribes the worthiest employments, as a suitable exertion of our immortal powers. It disposeth us to receive prosperity with that sedate and manly complacence which favourable circumstances are calculated to promote. It inspires a fortitude of spirit which enables us to sustain the assaults of adversity. The contemplation of immortality makes us regardless and almost forgetful of the pains that we suffer in our journey to it. It administers the best consolation under those distressing circumstances which every man, who thinks at all, must expect to meet with. I have in my eye at present the loss of friends, of

children, of connections endeared by a thousand ties. Such losses are, and from the nature of things must be, very frequent in the world. To part for a time is tolerable. But ah! to part for ever, if this were the consequence of death, I should think of it with distraction.

The persuasion of immortality, and the belief of a resurrection, were topics of joy and consolation, with the force of which the first christians were well acquainted, and they often apply them. It is the consideration of these doctrines that the apostle Paul, in the fourth chapter of this epistle, inculcates upon the Thessalonians. After insisting upon them with great energy, he concludes in this manner, *Wherefore comfort one another with these words*^k. I think it impossible for any person to read our Saviour's discourse relating to this subject, in the beginning and latter end of the fourteenth chapter of John's gospel, without feeling a mixture of complacence and melancholy highly delightful to the heart.

^k Verse 18.

Upon the whole, I submit it to the decision of every serious hearer, whether the belief of a powerful, wise and merciful governor of the world, the prospect of a happy immortality, and an uniform practice of righteousness, are not just and sufficient causes for producing an habitual joy and satisfaction in a man's mind; whether they are not naturally calculated for banishing gloom and discontent, and for promoting cheerfulness. I scarcely think that any man can deny that they are. There does not appear to me to be any refinement in this reasoning. I have avoided considering any thing of a curious and subtle nature, as the cause of the joy which we receive from christianity, because, though some such things might be specified, they are only partial causes, and do not extend to the generality of christians; whereas the considerations which I have pointed out are of universal influence.

I might have considered the peculiar doctrines of christianity, such for instance as the sacrifice of Christ, the promise of the Spirit, the resurrection of the body, the appointment of our Saviour to be judge of the world, the condescension, and charity, and meekness of his character, as just sources of christian consolation and delight: but such a detail could not at present have been entered upon, and I apprehend that every person will be sensible, that though these doctrines are different, and that the pleasure arising from the consideration of them admits of different modifications, yet there are some general ends which they all have in view, and some common principles by which they augment the joy of our minds. For instance, does not the doctrines of the satisfaction, of the resurrection, of the appointment of Jesus as the judge of the world, and the recollection of his character, all conspire in producing these consequences, to ascertain us of the placability and favour of God, and to strengthen our faith in a happy immortality? The doctrine

of the divine assistance is certainly most comfortable. But is it not chiefly felt, if I may say so, when the doctrine is realized, when the Spirit operateth upon the minds of men in engaging them to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, piety, charity, and in confirming their hopes of eternal happiness? Thus I have all along had respect to these doctrines as the principal foundations of our joy. Let us now attend to some reflections which naturally arise from what has been said.

In the first place: Is it not plain that we ought to consider religion as our best friend, and the source of our truest and most permanent joy? If we are strangers to its power and influence, we must be strangers to the noblest and most substantial pleasures of human life. For I would ask any man, what pleasures he can compare with those resulting from a well-governed mind, and a right-regulated practice, from the contemplation of Him who is the fountain of all excellence, from the prospect of dwell-

ing for ever with God and with Jesus Christ, of enjoying an eternal serenity, undisturbed by those calamities and dangers to which we are here exposed, uninterrupted by those doubts and misgivings, which here depress us, unobscured by that ignorance and darkness which we here lament? Tell me, ye who know the human heart, ye who generously feel for the woes of others, ye who exult in the happiness of your neighbour, tell me in what light ye consider those who would ravish from mortals such solacing and elevating joys? are not these the men to whom the wo pronounced by our benevolent Redeemer is justly applicable, *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, for ye neither go into the kingdom of heaven yourselves, nor suffer them that are entering to go in*¹.

But the pleasures of the world will still allure. And by engaging our minds to entertain a just value for these that have been just now mentioned, must we sacrifice the rest? must we banish social mirth, re-

¹ Matth, xxiii. 13. C 4

nounce agreeable company, and relinquish every innocent diversion? Where, my brethren, the necessity for this? Shall men be so foolish as to suppose things to be incompatible, which, from their very nature, can never be well relished but when conjoined? For my part, I believe that no man ever existed whose mind was solely and for ever occupied with the concerns of virtue and religion, important as they are. Such a temper is incompatible with humanity. But is the person worthy the name of a man, whose life is wholly taken up with mirth, company and diversion? If the things of this world and of the next were properly tempered together, do ye really think we should be losers as to our pleasures or our dignity? Do ye really think that a virtuous and religious man will receive less pleasure in company, or at a feast, in any public or private amusement, because he is virtuous and religious? I know the grounds upon which such an opinion stands; mere misapprehension, weak reasoning, and partial observation. I will only at present ap-

peal to fact. Do ye not know some of the very best and most pious of your acquaintance, that enter with proper relish into all the genuine and untainted pleasures that result from the various incidents of human life? they do not indeed spend all their time in these. But in this are they not true followers of pleasure? how irksome does perpetual pursuit, and reiterated enjoyment render these things! how soon do they pall upon the sense, and wear out the appetite! how shamefully do they degrade the soul, and sink the character! Give them their just room, and I acknowledge them, I feel them agreeable: Exalt them to a place they do not merit, and their littleness becomes conspicuous. Let us therefore *hold fast our integrity^m, and the profession of our faith without waveringⁿ*; persuaded that by so doing, we adhere to our best interests.

In the second place: We may discern the impropriety of considering religion as

^m Job xxvii. 5, 6.

ⁿ Heb. x. 23.

severe, gloomy, and unfriendly to human delight. Representations of this kind are frequent; but they are unjust and pernicious. That they are unjust appears from the tenor of the preceding discourse: and that they are pernicious can scarcely be disputed. Truth and utility are generally supposed to be coincident: and in the present case, experience sufficiently confirms the maxim. A more effectual method could not be devised to prevent the spread and influence of religion. A very elegant writer, who, though no professed divine, has done essential service to religion, illustrates this observation very agreeably by a similitude drawn from scripture history. “Those,” says he, “who represent religion in an unamiable light, are like the spies sent by Moses to make a discovery of the land of promise, when by their reports they discouraged the people from entering upon it. Those who shew us the joy, the cheerfulness, the good humour that naturally spring up in this happy state, are like the spies bringing along with them

“ the clusters of grapes and delicious fruits
“ that might invite their companions into
“ the country that produced them.” If we
would wish to recommend religion, it is
but justice to it to exhibit it in the form
that is most apt to win and to engage. If we
consider the character of our Saviour, it is
full of the most amiable, gentle, and en-
gaging virtues. The strong and perpetu-
ally present impression of divine things
which was upon his mind, made it natural
that he should not enter warmly into those
scenes that are calculated for giving inno-
cent pleasure and enjoyment to ordinary
mortals. But he was sometimes present at
them. He expressed no disapprobation of
them, and the whole complexion of his
life shews a most exalted purity without
any mixture of forbidding austerity. Bless-
ed be God, we live in an age when the
sincerity of our religion will not be esti-
mated by the demureness of our look, or
the fullness of our demeanour. Let us
shew it by more substantial and less equi-
vocal marks; by an uniform integrity and

that general good temper which is not merely constitutional, but derived from a clear conscience and a fervent faith.

Thirdly : Let the consideration of the joys which true religion permits, determine us more strongly against all unlawful pleasures. Our duty and our interest are strongly connected together. If we view things soberly, we have the greatest reason to be thankful that God has allowed us so many causes of joy and rejoicing. To desire more discovers the highest ingratitude. We are in some measure still in the condition of our first parents. We have a great variety of enjoyments left us. Instead of the fruit of one tree that was forbidden them, there are indeed many which we are prohibited to taste. If we venture on them notwithstanding, the consequence will be the same. We will feel compunction and remorse incomparably stronger than all the delight we can derive from them. Let us therefore resist all solicitations and enticements to that which is evil. Let a sense of

duty, the feelings of gratitude, and frequent reflection upon our enjoyments, excite us to maintain an equal and uniform lustre of virtue and religion. Instead of wantonly desiring to range through the field of unlimited indulgence, let us confine ourselves within the circle of virtuous gratification. Thus, my brethren, our lives shall be happy, our deaths serene, and our immortality glorious.

S E R M O N II.

J O H N x v. 15.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth: but I have called you friends.

THE different circumstances of men in society, with their different connexions and views, afford just reason for their observing a different kind of conduct in relation to one another. Distance, reserve, and a partial opening of the heart are very proper on some occasions; and though we have an undoubted claim to every instance of humanity from all those who share the same nature with ourselves, it does not follow that we have the same title to require or expect their familiarity and friendship. To give these their true value, they must be a voluntary offering, and proceed from a deliberate determination of the will. If this were not the case, and if all men were

to be treated in the same manner, familiarity and friendship would be terms quite unknown, and one general word would sufficiently denote that uniform affection which would equally be due to the whole species. But the distinction that has now been mentioned is evidently well founded; and our Saviour had it in his eye when he uttered the words of the text. *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth; but I have called you friends.*

Our divine master, when he entered upon his publick ministry, had selected a few followers to whom he gradually disclosed the design of his mission, and revealed the doctrines of salvation. In proportion as their minds were enlightened and expanded by the force of divine truth, he proceeded to open up to them the secret things of the kingdom of God, and accompanied his communications with every instance of sincere and affectionate attachment. To leave upon their hearts the most lasting impres-

sions of his condescension and goodness, he even disdains not to submit to a servile office in their favour, and adds the most tender assurance, that he acknowledges his connexion with them, as arising not merely from authority, but from friendship. *Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends.* From this time forward I consider you not in the light of distance and subjection, but as connected with me by much nobler and more endearing ties, even those of friendship: and consequently as having a right to all the marks of the most cordial regard, and obliged to all the instances of duty and affection which this relation merits and requires. What was said immediately to the Apostles, and applied in a particular manner to them, extends in a certain degree to every good christian, and is delivered for the instruction and comfort of all such. And I have made choice of these words at this time, as furnishing proper scope for a discourse on the advantages resulting from that intimate relation

into which our Saviour thus condescends to receive his followers.

I have no doubt but the apostles and first disciples of our Lord, who were admitted to the freest and fullest personal intercourse with him, must have had a sense of the importance and felicity of that intercourse superior to what almost any christian can now attain. Perhaps similar feelings indulged by us in the very same degree to which the natural principles of the mind, and the peculiar circumstances of the times would carry them in the case of the apostles, might in some respects be considered as proceeding from a spirit of enthusiasm, which, though it may be frequently amiable, is also frequently dangerous. But we are to remember, as a counterpoise to the happiness of the apostles, that they were called forth to the most uncommon trials of their faith and patience, and that, as they had many distinguished opportunities of cherishing the tender feelings of the heart, and of confirming their faith in

Jesus, so also they were under many peculiar temptations to suppress the former, and to renounce the latter.

The design of these remarks is to introduce an observation with regard to the method now proposed, namely, that in surveying the advantages resulting from that relation of friendship into which the Son of God admits his followers, I am chiefly to take notice of those which I believe might occur to a christian of a pious and sober turn of mind, who should set himself at this period deliberately to consider the subject, and who should be more careful to declare with simplicity the ingenuous feelings of his breast, than to say things which might surprize, inflame, or excite a powerful, but transient extasy.

In the first place I would remark, that the consciousness of possessing the friendship of one, who discovered such a temper and character as shone in our Saviour, must be a source of very high gratification,

even abstracting from every consideration of profit with which it is attended.

There are some principles, in the truth of which good and bad men are agreed. The sole difference, and indeed it is a very essential one, consists in the application of them. For instance; That happiness ought to be the supreme pursuit of mankind, is universally acknowledged. The great question is, How it may be obtained? No one, I think, can deny that every innocent and virtuous gratification is a natural and just object of our wishes; and if the consciousness of our having the friendship of a wise and worthy person affords such a gratification, it is undoubtedly one genuine source of happiness. That a consciousness of this kind does afford an innocent and virtuous gratification, it will not require much attention to be convinced. People who have lived long, and been almost wholly engrossed by the objects of ambition or avarice, are apt to estimate every thing by its tendency to purchase

power or riches. And such men pass for being wonderfully shrewd, and for having acquired a thorough knowledge of the world. But in truth they have only viewed it in one particular light : they have considered men merely as they appear engaged in political or commercial pursuits. But there are very many portions of human life which must be occupied with other concerns, and other pleasures. I appeal to the experience of my hearers; if the conversation or presence of a friend, or even the recollection of his amiable qualities, does not allay many griefs, and heighten many joys, even where he is not able to remove the causes of the one, and has no connexion, as the world is apt to judge of connexion, with the objects of the other. Is not this the secret working of providence, which hath united men by many other ties besides that of interest, or the power of promoting each others secular views?

If a good man is confined in a dungeon, the reflection that he has the approbation and sympathy of a virtuous friend under his unjust sufferings, will have a powerful tendency to support him, though he should be debarred from enjoying his company by the closeness of his prison, the severity of his keeper, or the distance of a thousand miles: while the wealth of worlds could not support a tyrant in the same circumstances, conscious as he must be that he merits universal detestation. It is a law in the material world, that if one body is put in motion, and strikes another, it loses so much of the force with which it was impelled, and communicates it to that other. In like manner it is a law in the moral world, that sympathy, either perceived in another, or reflected on as actually exerted, heightens our pleasures, and alleviates our pains. The very knowledge or recollection of a virtuous friendship, I do maintain it, will pour balm into the festered soul, and revive the dejected spirit, when gold, that idol of the world, cannot purchase the smallest re-

lief or consolation. In exquisite pain, incurable disease, or the immediate prospect of death, riches lose all their lustre, and the pursuits of ambition, like objects thrown at a distance, appear altogether diminutive. Turn your views to scenes of this kind, and you will feel the difference between a splendid apartment, a soft bed, numerous attendants, skilful physicians, which the worst of men may often command, and the affection and approbation of one virtuous friend. I put the matter strongly, because men are often insensible to the plainest truths; of which class I hold this proposition to be one, that the consciousness of possessing such a virtuous friendship, abstracted from every external advantage it may bring, affords a high gratification to the mind. I need only add, that the more excellent the person is with whom we are connected by this tie, the greater will be the enjoyment arising from it. But the character of Christ, considered as exhibiting every necessary qualification for the most endearing friendship, is truly striking.



S E R M O N II.

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What meekness, what condescension, what humane and generous sentiments, what tender and affectionate feelings did he display on a thousand occasions! Recollect his lamentations over Jerusalem. Behold his tears at the tomb of Lazarus. See his beloved disciple leaning on his bosom. Accompany him while he walks with his disciples to Emmaus. Review the history of his whole life. Hear his sublime discourses. Attend to his just, yet mild rebukes. Listen to the spirit and fervour of his prayers, and say, is it possible for your hearts to be unaffected, uninterested, uninflamed? *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come unto him, even unto his seat!*

I believe there are very few readers of the gospel who will not allow that the peculiar attachment which our Saviour shewed to John, must have imparted a very singular satisfaction to that disciple. Con-

• Job xxiii. 3.

sider what constitutes the real and essential felicity of human nature, and I doubt if ever any one enjoyed so large a portion of it as this happy man, though he was neither rich, nor powerful, nor flattered, nor gratified in any worldly passion, nor exempted from the severest persecutions. Consider the state of the apostles in general. The pleasure they had in sitting at the feet of Jesus, and hearing his instructions while he remained on earth, and their ardent wishes to be *absent from the body* and *present with the Lord* after his ascension into heaven, are not only free from all erroneous enthusiasm, but perfectly natural, and what every one might expect in their circumstances. I do not say that the consciousness of our Saviour's friendship, which is promised to all his disciples, will affect us so powerfully as it did those with whom he conversed, who witnessed his living virtues, who saw his face, and heard the *gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*. Faith must fall short of vision: but will it have no effect at all? Or must

not every well-disposed mind be deeply sensible of its influence? But, my brethren, the pleasure resulting from a sense of the attachment of the most worthy character in the world is not the sole or chief advantage proceeding from the friendship of our Saviour. It is attended with the most beneficial effects, and exerted in the most effectual manner for procuring and conveying the greatest blessings.

Friendship is naturally active. It exerts itself in prosecuting useful plans, and in bestowing agreeable tokens of its sincerity and ardour. And all that is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and all the great and heroic things that he did and endured, are instances of his love and attachment to his followers equally beautiful and beneficial. The doctrines which he inculcated, tending at once to the comfort and to the sanctification of human nature, the precepts which he enjoined for the government of our hearts and lives, the example which he exhibited of every excellence, the in-

stitution of his last supper, the assurances of his continual regard and assistance; what are they all but so many substantial memorials of the purest and noblest friendship?

Surely the least attention to human nature will shew that these are to be accounted blessings of the first importance. They will bear to be tried by every test, and viewed on every side. If you consider them as productive of the most peaceful and sublime enjoyments; if you contemplate them as proper to form the minds and manners of youth, to restrain their impetuosity, to exalt their aims, and to render them both lovely and honourable; as no less fit for administering support and joy to declining years; as engaging men to improve prosperity to the worthiest purposes, and helping them to bear affliction with a manly firmness; as adding dignity to the highest stations, and rendering obscurity itself illustrious; must not their value on all these accounts be acknowledged and admired? Ah, my brethren,

what manner of men should we be, if the doctrine and example of Jesus had their full effect upon us! Of how many fictitious wants should we be cured, with what moderation should we receive, and with what magnanimity resign what are commonly called the gifts of fortune? Were the doctrines of life and immortality deeply impressed on our minds, the so much dreaded forms of old age, and pain, and sickness, and sorrow, to whom we must pay some tribute in our way to heaven, though their countenances may be stern, yet would not terrify us greatly. If we live sequestered in the vale of solitude and poverty, and read and practise the gospel, and review the memorials of our Saviour's friendship, we shall look up to the great without either admiration or envy; and enjoying green herbs and contentment, which honest labour and virtuous exercise have prepared us for tasting with pleasure, we shall not repine that we do not share in the pernicious luxury of the rich. But if the honours and possessions of this world should

be bestowed upon us, the gospel, that invaluable legacy of Christ to his friends, will teach us to add the true lustre to these by untainted integrity, universal humanity, and a desire to seize every opportunity of doing good.

I might render the illustration of this subject much fuller : but what has been said will be sufficient to evince, that the blessings I mentioned, when I entered on this topic of my discourse, are of the first importance, and that the friendship which gives a right to them brings along with it the most essential advantages.

The spirit of the world indeed, fostered by avarice, a spirit which they who are actuated by it do sometimes blush to own, suggests an opinion, that nothing can be an adequate exertion, or infallible evidence of friendship, but what contributes in some way or another to a man's influence or to his figure in life. As if a purple robe were a defence against pain, remorse, despair,

or death ! or as if riches that are said, and I believe, often thought to be able to purchase every thing, could buy the pleasures of a good conscience, an exemption from the stings of a bad one, a happy exit out of this world, or a right to the tree of life ! *Ye simple ones, how long will ye love simplicity ?* Ye are wise in the esteem of the children of this world ; but listen to the verdict of a more impartial jury ; let reason, experience, and inspiration speak. Since the creation of the world, mere riches or power could never render a human creature truly great, or truly happy. But I could mention many who are justly considered as lights of the world, who, though destitute of every gaudy trapping, and without any one of the boasted advantages of life, will shine for ever with the lustre of commanding virtue. Think of those who had neither staff, nor scrip, nor change of raiment, and *of whom the world was not worthy*. Where indeed are the people celebrated in the annals of time who do not

glory in rewarding the poverty and the merit of some of their ancestors? Reflect on these and a thousand things that will occur, and be persuaded that, in renouncing the vanities and grandeurs which you are too apt to admire, in revealing the doctrines of life and immortality, in exhibiting a pattern of perfect virtue, in offering to lead you by his Spirit in the paths of righteousness, and in reconciling you to God by his cross, your Master hath given you the most valuable and durable marks of his friendship and regard.

But to mention a little more particularly one of the most important advantages resulting from the friendship of Christ; I mean that security and those hopes which it gives a man in the approach of death.

A wise man prepares against many possible evils which may never befall him. But how foolishly improvident is it, not to prepare against an evil that is certain? In youth it is wise to make provision for old

age, to lay up in early years the consolations which piety and active virtue can procure, to support the feeble and tottering steps of fourscore. Yet we may never arrive at that period. But death, we are sure, is an event that will inevitably take place. The charms of forcerers, the hoards of misers, the skill of physicians, the strength of guards, can neither soothe, nor bribe, nor terrify, nor elude that awful messenger. How desirable is it then that we should be prepared to meet him with alacrity and fortitude! Death, my brethren, is naturally a tremendous form, and we stand in need of aid when called to encounter it. It will introduce us to a new and unknown country; and we shall sigh for some friendly conductor to take us by the hand. If in this struggle and the scene that succeeds it, the father could enjoy the company of his son, the husband the society of his wife, and if brothers could lend each other assistance, it might inspire some courage. But nature forbids the intercourse. Yet the christian who relies on the promises of

Jesus, knows that he shall not engage in that struggle, nor enter on that scene alone or unsupported. *When he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, he will fear no evil, for the Lord, the shepherd of souls, is with him, his rod and his staff shall comfort him*¹. Recollecting the gracious declaration of Jesus, *Whosoever doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my mother and sister and brother*², his fluttering heart is inspired with courage, and elated with hope: he departs in peace to his native land, trusting to the guidance and protection of his almighty Friend. Where now are ye, ye gilded prospects, ye gay delusions, ye pleasing dreams? Where now all the boasted schemes and hopes of the covetous, the voluptuous and the vain? Lo! They are vanished, they are nothing. And a serene, a happy death is all in all. You cannot deny the doctrine: but do you doubt the power of the friendship of Jesus? Do

¹ Psalm xxiii. 4. ² Matth. xii. 50.

you doubt that a consciousness of it is able to confer this composure, and this felicity? Consult the apostles: enquire at the martyrs: recollect the last moments of the best men whom you have known to die in the full exercise of their reason: Let them bear witness: to them I appeal.

S E R M O N III.

2 KINGS viii. 13.

And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog; that he should do this great thing?

IT happened that Ben-hadad king of Syria when he was sick; heard of the prophet Elisha's being at Damascus. Prompted by a curiosity about the future that seems natural to man, and anxious to know before-hand the event of his distemper, he sends Hazael, one of his ministers and favourites, to enquire of the prophet whether he should recover or not? In obedience to his master's commands, Hazael went to execute his commission, and according to the custom of those days, took along with him a present of every good thing of Damascus. In the most respectful manner he delivers his message; for he stood before the prophet and said, *Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I*

recover of this disease? The answer of Eli-
sha was mysterious, and probably not per-
fectly understood by Hazael. Go, says the
prophet, *say unto him, Thou mayest certainly
recover; howbeit, the Lord hath shewed me,
that he shall surely die.* Then fixing his
countenance steadily for some time, and
exhibiting the most natural and striking
signs of inward emotion and agitation of
spirit, he began to weep. Surprised at his
tears, Hazael enquired the cause, and he
answered in these remarkable words, *Be-
cause I know the evil that thou wilt do to
the children of Israel; their strong holds wilt
thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou
slay with the sword, and wilt dash their chil-
dren, and rip up their women with child.*
Such barbarous and cruel deeds seemed so
shocking, that in the words of our text,
Hazael in the strongest manner expresses
his detestation of them. *And Hazael said,
But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should
do this great thing?*

It does not appear that this answer of Hazael was the effect of hypocrisy, or any artful design to conceal his real sentiments; it proceeded from the natural and immediate dictates of his heart. Yet from the atrocious crime he committed the very next day in murdering his master, we have no reason to doubt, that in the war which he afterwards carried on against the united armies of the kings of Israel and Judah, the prophet's prediction was fully accomplished. And indeed, when we attend to what passes in the world, we must be sensible that the case of Hazael, tho' it may be uncommon in its degree, is far from being singular in its kind.

To trace then the causes of this astonishing ignorance of ourselves, appears to be a subject of very general use and importance. When the causes of a disease are distinctly known, the application of proper remedies will prove more easy and more certain. I intend therefore in the following discourse, to point out some of the principal reasons,

upon which the ignorance of wicked men concerning themselves, and the strange partiality in their judgments as to their future conduct, are founded; and to conclude with a few practical inferences from what is delivered.

In entering upon my subject, I would remark, that ignorance of ourselves is of two kinds; Ignorance with regard to our past actions, and ignorance as to the future conduct we shall maintain in life. Of the first kind the scripture affords us a very remarkable instance in the case of David, who, induced by the striking allegory of Nathan, unknowingly passed the severest sentence upon himself. But it is ignorance of the second kind I mentioned, of which there is so strong an example exhibited to us in the text, which I now purpose to consider. Hazael was so blind to his own character, that he believed himself wholly incapable of the crimes which he afterwards committed. Whence could this proceed? or how does it happen, that the declara-

tions of men in similar circumstances are so little to be relied upon?

The first and most obvious cause of this ignorance of men proceeds from the total want of attention to, and reflection upon their real characters and tempers. Is it surprising that a man should be ignorant of a subject which he has never considered? Is the meanest art and employment of life to be learned without some pains and application? It is needless to give a particular instance in any one profession; for it holds true in every one of them, that before any person understands it, he must be taught by another, or bestow labour and diligence himself. Can we expect that the general rule is not to take place with respect to the knowledge of our own minds? But are not a thousand subjects of less utility and importance, more the subjects of our reflection and meditation, than our own hearts and tempers? For rendering subjects more plain and intelligible, the ingenuity of men has devised various methods, and these methods

are attended to by those whose concern it is ; but instead of using and applying those rules which might be proper and useful, in order to make us acquainted with ourselves, are not most men more anxious to find out a variety of expedients, by which they may fortify and confirm themselves in their ignorance ? Need I point out to you that entire dissipation of thought, that unremitting pursuit of pleasure, that perpetual levity, which are considered not only as arts to obtain present gratifications, but partly prosecuted with the very view I mentioned before, to keep men strangers to themselves, their tempers, and their dispositions ? Can you name an enemy that seems more to be an object of fear to great numbers than reflection ? In this situation it would be next to a miracle, if a man were not ignorant of himself.

I acknowledge that one must be in some measure conscious of what passes in his mind. The objects he pursues must be perceived by him ; he must feel the passions

he is perpetually endeavouring to gratify. But these are merely facts which he remembers to-day, but forgets to-morrow. To the generality of men they are like dividing the waters of a river by your hand; it is no sooner removed than the stream joins, and you can discern no mark where the breach was. For instance, what course of life may we suppose Hazael to have led before his interview with the prophet? Educated at the court of a powerful monarch, by whose favour he possessed a high place, would it be a singular case, if he had devoted his whole time to the functions of his office, and the indulgence of his desires? It had perhaps been frequently a question with him, How shall I preserve and encrease my power? but he had probably never asked himself, What have I done to disgrace my station? or, How shall I act to be worthy of the favour and dignity which I enjoy? Those features of his former character, which might have given a man of penetration cause to suspect, that in case he should arrive at supreme

power, he would act the cruel scenes which the prophet predicted, Hazael himself had probably never attended to in any other manner, than as a *man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was*^a. But even this supine thoughtlessness and inattention is not the only, nor perhaps the chief cause why bad men form so partial a judgment in their own favour, and believe that they are free from the vices which lurk in some secret corner of the heart, and which wait but for a proper season to unfold themselves.

To account then for this more fully, I would observe in the second place, that there is implanted in man a natural abhorrence of that which is evil, and a natural sympathy for the sufferings of others. Tho' we are in a corrupted and depraved state, yet in these respects we bear the marks of a divine original. The soul of man,

^a James i. 23, 24.

which is the workmanship of God, is at variance, in its sentiments at least, with every cruel and barbarous action. Allow the unprejudiced and genuine feelings of the heart to judge, and nature itself will not err in applauding the virtuous and the worthy part, and condemning the contrary. If we convey our thoughts back to past ages, and observe tyrants depopulating kingdoms, and innocent subjects suffering under their rod, does not an honest indignation spring up against the former, and a powerful sympathy exert itself in favour of the latter? By his cruel decree, Herod fills the streets of Bethlehem and the coasts round about with lamentation, weeping, and great mourning. Herod, the barbarous deed has devoted thy name to infamy thro' all ages! Ye wretched mothers, while humanity remains, the tear of pity and of virtue will never be denied as a tribute due to your sufferings!

Now this abhorrence of evil, and this sympathy and sorrow for the miseries of

others, are not principles which are confined to the virtuous and religious; they naturally operate upon all. By a series of wicked actions the impious try to stifle, and to overcome them; but till they are trampled upon a thousand times they are not totally extinguished. A silent and a seared conscience, is not an easy or speedy acquisition.

When therefore cruel and barbarous actions are represented to us, we recoil, as it were, from the thought of them. If the passions which prompt to them are asleep (and this will often be the case with the worst of men) the better principles of our nature resume a share of their native vigour, and we cannot persuade ourselves that we would really practise what we so sincerely abhor, or occasion to others those sufferings which excite our pity to those that feel them. Let us observe whether the case mentioned in the text does not confirm this reasoning. Surely to ravage a country with fire and sword, to massacre

men, women, and children, not to relent at the cry of innocence, to steel the heart against the tears of a defenceless mother, and not to spare even the helpless, uncomplaining babe who had never seen the light, are deeds of the utmost inhumanity. The man who could look forward, and view himself as the author of these, would be more than a monster. At this time Hazael was removed from every thing that might excite his vicious appetite. In the presence of a person whose very appearance made him the object of reverence, he could not but feel the natural risings of his soul in favour of virtue and goodness. In this situation was it any wonder, that this man, habitually unacquainted with himself, should exclaim against his being capable of those crimes, the very naming of which chill the blood, and overwhelm the soul? *But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* By being capable of so atrocious deeds, I should not only renounce the

principles of virtue, but the very nature of a man.

In the third place: The partiality which bad men show in judging of themselves, and their ignorance of their real characters, are partly founded in the nature of vice.

Vice when it is continued, not only corrupts the heart, but perverts the judgment. By its deceitfulness man is hardened against the sense of those crimes he has already committed, and what is stranger still, while his heart condemns them in others, he continues to commit them himself, without being sensible that he is guilty of them. Vice is the greatest, perhaps the only sorceress upon the face of the earth. Those who drink of her cup, becoming intoxicated with it, do not perceive objects in their true and proper light. Like men infected with some diseases which confer the same colour upon every thing they look at, the vicious often view themselves, not as they truly are, but thro' a false and deceit-

ful medium which has a power to give a semblance of health to sickness, of honesty to corruption, and of rectitude to the greatest deformity.

The fascination of sin then engaging men to form so wrong a judgment of the present state of their temper, and leaving them by a strange delusion in possession of their natural principles, while they are counter-acting their dictates; it is impossible, but they will be still more partial, as to the judgment of their future conduct. The principles that have been already taken notice of, combine with the bewitching nature of sin in this case to blind their eyes, and to increase their ignorance. But farther it is to be observed, that vice is likewise in its nature gradual and progressive. It is known even to a proverb, that no person becomes altogether wicked on a sudden. The intermediate steps must be as it were measured before one reaches the summit. The checks of natural conscience are not restrained at once. Take an Ahab, or a Jezebel, a

Manasses, or a Herod, and the least reflection will convince us that they arrived at the high pitch of wickedness which have rendered them objects of detestation, only by degrees. Observe a young person at his entering upon vice. The first crimes he commits are gone about with a timid look and trembling heart. He seems to be conscious, that the eye of God is upon him, and that he is offering an indignity to his own nature. But in a little time with less remorse and apprehension than the first steps in vice occasioned, he proceeds to daring crimes which he could not have suffered himself to think of, even for a long time after he was the servant of sin. Habits of sin, like other habits, require time to form them; but when rooted, and strengthened by a frequent exercise, they totally change the nature, and render us perfectly different creatures from what we were.

The progress of vice may be therefore compared to the rolling of a stone down a declivity: at first it moves slowly and

gently, but before it reaches the bottom it acquires an impetuosity and force that are irresistible. If you were to view a river at the place of its rise, you will see a small stream, whose course might be easily stopped or changed; but as you trace it, it still increases, till it cannot be restrained by the power of man. When Hazael stood before the prophet, he had travelled but a short way in the path of vice; but he neither had the resolution, nor the inclination to controul his irregular appetites. Elisha, by the spirit which dwelled in him, unveiled the future. He pointed out some of the scenes which this man was to act in the succeeding part of his journey; but they were too distant, they were too unlike the past, and they depended too much upon passions that were at present quiet and dormant, for the person himself to be sensible of them. More impartiality than can be expected is requisite for a vicious man to judge fairly of his present state; but to discern whether keen desires, violent passions, an unsubdued spirit, fit opportunities, and in-

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veterate habits may at length carry him, is almost impossible. To acknowledge the pitch of vice to which he may be brought, would be to suppose himself much worse than he really is.

Finally, my brethren, another reason why wicked men are apt to flatter themselves with their being incapable of many vices which they afterwards commit, may be discerned from the nature of temptation. There are a great many of the most heinous crimes that man can be guilty of, to which no particular principle or passion in his nature leads him. To delight in cruelty, is in no sense natural to man, and it is but seldom acquired. But this forms no sufficient security against our committing cruel actions. The feeling no propensity towards them, but on the contrary an aversion, gives a bias to our judgment, and makes us believe that we shall never be stained by them: but the danger lies, not from a direct desire, but from seeing such and such actions necessary to obtain certain ends

upon which our hearts are set. The prompter to cruel and barbarous actions is not a love of cruelty; but the temptation may arise either from unlimited ambition, uncontrouled lusts, or a thirst of revenge. Temptation does not always intrude itself upon us. Till objects that excite the appetites of wicked men are in some measure within their reach, they seldom wish for the attainment of them. In the meantime the passions which rule them are as it were asleep: they conceal themselves from the view even of those who are governed by them. But no sooner is the temptation offered, than they awake with all their fury, and while their sway prevails, plunge the man into excesses which he could not have believed himself capable of committing.

The man who suffers one unlawful passion to obtain the empire over his heart, has really every thing to fear. He submits to the dominion of a tyrant who will bear no refusal, and will never suffer a command

to be disputed. Let us consider the case of that man whom our text represents to us.

He was the favourite and minister of a powerful sovereign. To obtain this office had been at first probably the highest aim of his ambition. But now he was within one step of the throne, his master's sickness opens the prospect; being accidentally left alone with him, the whole force of temptation overwhelms his soul, and the crown appears ready to fall on his own head. The demon takes full possession of his heart; and the man who never before, perhaps in any flagrant instance, had transgressed the duty of a faithful subject, now impelled by the lust of power, murders his benefactor and his king. Will dominion thus acquired be solicitous about the justice of the means by which it must be preserved? or will revenge never actuate the heart which ambition has so thoroughly corrupted? Believe it not. If one devil enters, there will be seven ready to follow. What are the lives of a thousand innocent persons to

the man who has never endeavoured to restrain his ambition, his revenge, or his pride? The sword of Hazaël is unsheathed; his unlawful passions impel him; and the miserable inhabitants of Judea feel that all his sentiments of humanity are but weak barriers against their force.

Thus I have endeavoured to trace some of the principal causes why wicked men are so ignorant of themselves, and form such a partial judgment with regard to their future conduct. Let us now attend to some of the practical instructions which this subject affords. In the first place, we may observe in general from what has been said, how solid a foundation is laid in human nature for virtue and religion. They approve themselves to the natural feelings of men, and whatsoever is contrary to them is naturally hated and abhorred. It is not the language of the good only, How amiable is virtue! but even the wicked give their testimony to the same truth. O virtue! at thy image the worst must bow; and

while they despise thy counsel, they must yet confess thy authority. In this situation how inexcusable are they who would deny the difference between virtue and vice, good and evil! On the other hand, let it be ever our care to maintain the rights of the former sacred and inviolable. Let that holy religion which best unfolds its precepts, whose Author gave a living example of its perfection, whose rewards, promises and threatnings are its surest and its chief supports, be ever dearer to us than life itself. If not only by the light of nature, but by the clearer light of revelation, we must be fully sensible of the beauty of holiness, let us follow after the practice of it. But more particularly, I would observe, from what hath been said concerning the progress of vice, the great danger, and fatal consequences of a first departure from the paths of integrity. The man who once suffers himself to be allured by sin, knows not how far he may proceed. *If sinners therefore entice thee, saith the wise man, my son*

consent thou not^t: In this case *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*. Let no person give up with that which is good and right, presuming that he will stop when he pleases. I present you with a picture at which you startle; yet if you are now initiated into vice, let a few years revolve, and you yourselves will perhaps be the original. Let me therefore with earnestness exhort every one, and young people in particular, in the words of Solomon, *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away*^u. Temptation, my brethren, is powerful; we know not whether we shall be able to endure it. With fervency of heart then let us offer up that petition which is enjoined by our Master, who knew the heart, its weakness and its feebleness; *Lead us not into temptation*^x.

Lastly: From what has been said, we may see the necessity of endeavouring to conquer every irregular and unlawful ap-

^t Prov. i. 10. ^u Prov. iv. 14. ^x Mat. vi. 13.

petite. The train of vices, which one evil passion may lead us into, may be vastly great. Not only are we liable to those which have that passion for their object, but to a variety of others which may appear as means necessary in order to obtain its gratification. A city may be betrayed by one secret enemy, as well as by a thousand. Besides, my brethren, the fact is, that our sins and our follies proceed more from one principal passion than from a variety of lesser ones. This ruling passion is commonly the source of most of our errors; let us endeavour thoroughly to subdue it. I conclude my discourse in the words of the apostle, *Let us therefore lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith* ^v.

^v Heb. xii. 1.

S E R M O N IV.

A C T S xxiv. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled.

FROM the preceding part of this history we learn that the Jews entertained a most violent enmity against Paul, because they apprehended that he had an intention of destroying the whole fabrick of their law and polity. As soon as they knew of his being at Jerusalem, they laid hold on him, and having obtained leave from the chief captain to scourge him, they bound him with thongs, and were preparing to execute the sentence, when the apostle claimed the privilege of a Roman citizen. By this means he was delivered from the open effects of their malice; but intent on his destruction, they entered into a secret combination against

his life. Paul having been informed of this by his sister's son, desired him to go to Lyfias, and to make the matter known to him. Upon being informed of the plot, Lyfias sends him under a strong guard to Cesarea, to be examined by Felix the Roman governor. The character of Felix, from the best accounts we have of him, is shortly this. He had paved his way to his present power by several intrigues, and the favour of some retainers to the court of Rome, at that time the most corrupted and vicious. He had been very active in the punishment and suppression of robberies, which were then very frequent in Judea; and this gave occasion to the encomium of Tertullus in the beginning of his oration. But he had been guilty of the grossest partiality, and of the most scandalous violations of justice in many instances, and of a most inhuman murder in the case of Jonathan the high-priest. At the period to which our text refers, he also lived in an infamous commerce with Drusilla,

whom he had seduced to leave her lawful husband, and to remain with him.

Before this man Paul is brought to answer for himself, and an accusation having been preferred against him by Tertullus, whom the high-priest and elders had employed for this purpose, he delivered his defence with such fortitude, magnanimity and force, that tho' Felix could not resolve to acquit him, yet he ordered several indulgences to be shewn him in his confinement, and left him with some curiosity to hear him again more fully concerning that cause which had occasioned his imprisonment. Accordingly, a few days after, he sends for him, that he himself together with Drusilla, might receive some information concerning the doctrine of Christ.

It was at this time that the apostle, among other articles of the christian faith, insisted particularly on those, which might most readily touch the governor's conscience and lead him to repentance and amendment;

on the indispensable necessity of observing the rules of justice and righteousness; of submitting ourselves to the laws of temperance and sobriety; and on the certainty of that final judgment, wherein a retribution will be awarded according to our deserts. Upon these subjects he spoke with such energy and power, that the governor was alarmed, and agitated by the violent emotions of fear and remorse. *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and of judgment to come, Felix trembled.*

From this portion of sacred history I intend to deduce some reflections, which may, by the blessing of God, have a tendency to reclaim us from iniquity, or establish us in religion and virtue.

In the first place, I observe from this passage, that God has discovered to us, by the immediate information of our own minds, some of the most essential parts of our duty and obligations. Paul properly spoke before Felix concerning righteousness and temperance, and appealed to his own mind

for the conviction of the indispensable obligation of these virtues. The same apostle tells us in another place, *God hath not left himself without witness^a* at any time; and that *the Gentiles which have not the law, immediately delivered from heaven, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another^b*. The great rules for the regulation of life and manners are not left for the subjects of deep enquiry and abstruse researches, but by the finger of God himself they are imprinted on our minds in the most legible characters; for when God formed man at first, he formed him after his own image, and gave him eyes to see, and understanding to discern between good and evil: a heart to approve of, and delight in the former, and to abhor and disapprove of the latter; and though the brightness of the divine image is sullied in the human soul, yet it is not totally destroyed. In what region of the earth was ingratitude ever approved and rewarded?

^a Acts xiv. 17.

^b Rom. ii. 14.

Did injustice or cruelty, as such, ever meet with the sanction of the law? Or have not piety, justice and clemency always, and in all countries approved themselves true, lovely, and of good report?

It is acknowledged, that when we consider things in one view, we are apt to think that the particular laws of states, or established customs of nations, have often contradicted the general laws of nature. But were we to examine the appearances which suggest this thought, or even to consider those instances in which the contradiction was real, they might be accounted for without overturning the principle now established. The great rules of morals may have been naturally discovered; and yet when men have endeavoured to class duties, and to descend to a greater speciality than the plain suggestions of the mind dictated, or to fix the different merits of duties, where there seemed to be a competition, or to determine precisely what were the proper external marks of our internal disposition,

then they may have erred, and been much misled. We must make allowances too for wrong education, violent passions, unthinking levity, or unreasonable fears. These often gave rise to extravagant and absurd institutions, which were afterwards recommended by custom, and thus implicitly received and implicitly obeyed. In this manner the candle of the Lord may, by degrees, be almost extinguished; darkness may overwhelm the soul, and error be embraced as truth.

This was actually the case in a great measure, when the sun of righteousness appeared in the world, to rekindle the sacred flame in the human mind, to point out our duty, and to lead us by his Spirit in the path of righteousness. But is it not one of the great excellencies of our holy religion, that it approves itself in the strongest manner to mankind, by its conformity to their natural principles of piety, justice, charity and temperance?

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The commandments prescribed by it, are not hidden from us, neither are they far off. *They are not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up to heaven for us and bring them to us, that we may hear them and do them? neither are they beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring them to us, that we may hear them and do them? but they are very nigh unto thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do them^c.* And indeed, had we not minds formed for the knowledge and service of God, for the love of mankind, and for the observance of the rules of temperance and sobriety, we could not be the objects of religion: for religion does not bestow upon us new feelings; it only applies to those feelings which God has given us. Even where it points out duties, of which we should have otherwise been ignorant, still the obligation to these may be discerned from their being suitable to those principles which the author of religion at first impressed upon our hearts.

^c Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 13, 14.

Secondly, In the verse now under consideration, we have a very striking instance of the power with which conscience is invested, not only to inform us of our duty, but to punish us for the breach of it. Paul reasoned of righteousness, from which Felix, as a magistrate, as a judge, and as a private person, had often departed. Felix lived in a most infamous commerce with Drusilla; Paul therefore discoursed of temperance. Of the obligations to righteousness and temperance, Felix, tho' neither a Jew nor a Christian, was not ignorant: and when his transgression of these obligations was recalled to his mind, it naturally excited sensations of pain and remorse. But when the minister of Christ represented to him the awful retribution for the deeds done in the body, then his inmost soul was roused. The apostle's words coincided with his own natural apprehensions, and the vengeance of heaven seemed already to have overtaken him. His whole frame was agitated; and, unable to bear it longer, he immediately remanded the prisoner.

Thus God has conferred upon conscience a most sacred authority, which no man can violate without being self-condemned; and suffering the most terrible punishment from its reproaches: Of this we have the fullest attestations in history, both sacred and profane. In the height of prosperity indeed, a sense of guilt may be sometimes overpowered and laid asleep; but the least accident or affliction awakens it, and shews that the fire had decayed for a little, only to flame with the greater violence. Even prosperity does not always prevent the sense of guilt: remorse, like some inveterate and incurable disease, preys constantly upon the heart of those who by their deeds have given birth to it, and shews that their judgment lingereth not. We have a very striking instance of this in one of the tyrants of Sicily. After acquiring the royal authority by injustice, cruelty, and murder, he lived in the utmost splendour, but he was constantly harrassed by tormenting fears, proceeding from his aggravated guilt. He dreaded the just punishment of his crimes

from his domestics, and his very children. One of his ministers having asked the possession of his splendid station for a day; he cloathed him in his royal robes, placed him upon his throne, set before him the most costly entertainment, and ordered the most illustrious attendance to be paid him; but as an emblem of the continual apprehension of his own mind, he suspended a naked sword from the ceiling by a single hair, directly above his head; and thus he sat constantly dreading that the day in which he attained his wished-for dignity would prove the last of his life. I need not make any remarks on this history, nor multiply examples of wretches, who from awakened consciences have endured misery similar to that of this tyrant. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked*^d. A respite indeed may, by want of reflection, by dissipation or some other cause, be obtained for a little from the reproaches of a guilty

^d Isaiah lvii. 20, 21.

conscience; but this can never be called true peace.

It is a very remarkable property of this faculty, that it applies any suffering which befalls a person to the crime which it condemns, tho' it be not directly inflicted as a punishment for that crime, and forces him to consider it as a token of the just vengeance of heaven. We are not informed, that any punishment immediately followed, upon the crime of Jacob's sons, in selling their brother as a slave, or that they were touched with a sense of their iniquity; but they were no sooner imprisoned in Egypt, after an interval of many years, under a pretence of their being spies (which, if they had been as innocent in other respects, as they were in this, might have appeared an event in the ordinary course of Providence) than their consciences immediately applied the punishment as the just reward of their guilt. Therefore do *they say to one another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother; in that we saw the anguish of his soul when*

he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us^e.

It is farther worthy of observation, that, even where the mind is left in uncertainty as to the import of any unusual event, a guilty conscience is immediately roused and dreads the worst. When Belshazzar sat at his feast, and the hand appeared writing on the wall, as he was ignorant of what was written, he might have imagined it to be good, as readily as evil: but his guilt was his interpreter; and tho' he did not understand the writing, this informed him, that it betokened no good to him. *Therefore was his countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another^f.* How natural was it for conscience to present the reflection to Herod, when he heard of Christ's miraculous works, that it was John the baptist whom he had beheaded, that had arisen from the

^e Gen. xlii. 21.

^f Dan. v. 6.

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dead, and performed those wonderful things?

Conscience then may be lulled for a little, but the most trivial thing imaginable may awaken it. The wicked man has reason to dread a dark night, a solitary situation, an accidental expression, any common or uncommon incident. When Felix called for the apostle, he intended nothing but a little entertainment; but before he rose, how just reason had he to say, as Ahab said to Elijah, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* The happiness of the wicked, my brethren, may be compared to so many figures in the sand: The wave no sooner comes to the place where they are, than they are razed. By our Omnipotent Creator conscience is placed within our breasts, as our ruling faculty. It erects its tribunal there, and accuses, judges, acquits, or condemns. How irresistible its power! Who ever exalted himself against it, and prospered? Or what colour of life is so black and

2 1 Kings xxi. 20.

dismal as that, where a man is at enmity with his own mind?

In the third place, The text leads our view to two men of very opposite characters, and in very different circumstances; in such a manner as tends to correct the judgment we are apt to form with regard to power and external appearances. We see Felix a Roman governor, surrounded with the ministers of his will, attended to with all the marks of regard, spoken of with respect, and addressed with that flattery which it requires an uncommon degree of virtue not to take pleasure in. Would not the ambitious who moved in an inferior sphere, judge this man to be crowned with a garland composed of flowers which conferred an uncommon lustre and honour upon the wearer? yet listless days and hours are often the lot of the great. It was probably when neither business engaged him, nor a lawless or irregular appetite solicited a gratification, that he resolved to hear Paul by way of entertainment, or perhaps out of

compliment to Drusilla, who was a Jewess, and might be somewhat interested in a cause, which had occasioned such an uproar at Jerusalem. Paul therefore is sent for; and appearing before one, who had both the pretext, and the power of inflicting immediate death upon him, he seems the object which calamity had set up to pierce with her sharpest darts. In the mind of the Romans who were present, did not the desire naturally spring up, and did not ardour give it utterance? May I ever be an attendant upon the happy Felix! but from the fears which possess, or the fate that may overtake that wretched prisoner, may I ever be delivered!

But how widely does man misjudge, when he looks only at what strikes the external eye? For power and grandeur, tho' pursued with the utmost keenness as the companions, yea as the very parents of happiness, are frequently deceitful phantoms, totally unconnected with that great object of all human wishes. We have a very

strong instance of this before us; a very little reflection will soon engage us to reckon on the prisoner the great and the happy man, and the judge the mean and the unhappy wretch. To be sensible of this, let us draw aside the outward veil by which we may be imposed upon, and look into their hearts.

Felix, then, was the subject of many ungovernable passions, which like so many harpies, continually cried for gratification; and that they might be gratified, plunged him into a thousand excesses, the reflection upon which filled him with disapprobation and abhorrence of himself. His guards surrounded him, and power employed all her artifices to make him happy; but from a secret corner guilt often bent his bow, and pierced him with the arrows that are the most strongly barbed, and the most deeply penetrating of any that are borne in the quiver of affliction. When he looked within, he discerned his soul to be black with guilt. Beyond the fleeting and precarious prospect of a few years, which even his past

experience could inform him, would be far from being years of unmixed joy, hope did not administer from her cup one cordial drop to support his spirit; but despair hovered round him, and tho' he avoided the sight of this monster with the greatest care, yet she often intruded into his presence, and overwhelmed his mind. For can we think, that the words of this prisoner roused terrors which had never been roused before, by any of those pursuits in which he had been engaged, by any of those injuries he had committed, or by any of that blood he had shed? Be not deceived then. Felix, in spite of appearances, was the prey of ungovernable insatiable passions, at enmity with himself, haunted by the sense of his guilt, and often tormented with those distressing fears, which were augmented by considering them as the presage of future and greater punishment.

Let us turn our view next to Paul. Tho' standing at the tribunal of a judge, and accused as a criminal, yet what greatness, and

erectness of mind does he discover? Neither the evils which surrounded him, nor the evils which threatened him, could overwhelm his mind, because he had foreseen them, and was willing to endure them for his Master's sake. The tears of his friends were ready to break his heart, before he went up to Jerusalem; but at that very time he was ready to endure not only bonds, but death, for the name of the Lord Jesus^b. By what avenue was it possible for misfortune, grievous misfortune, to enter, and seize the man who could apply to himself this all-powerful consolation; *Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men?*ⁱ Blessed God! what a calmness and serenity does a clear conscience diffuse over the most disagreeable external circumstances; while to a guilty mind, often in the very meridian of prosperity, there appears nothing but darkness and despair!

And now, my brethren, having from this portion of scripture shown the manner

^b Acts xx. 24.

ⁱ Ch. xxiv. 16.

in which God has discovered many branches of our duty; having illustrated the natural power and authority of conscience; and having endeavoured to establish a just measure for estimating human happiness; let me draw a few inferences by way of application.

We have seen that even the light of nature pointed out the duty of man in many instances, and led him to discern his own fault in not attending to it; but the light of nature was only as a light shining in a dark place. Let this therefore excite our gratitude, that we live in a period, when *the day-spring from on high has visited us*. Let us be thankful that the clouds and darkness which overspread the world are dispelled by the sun of righteousness, which has arisen, as with health and healing under his wings. And whereas, when conscience in a natural state was once awakened, there could scarcely remain any hope, but a fearful looking for of judgment, (for unassisted reason could not certainly inform a man, that even an alteration of conduct

could procure an interest in the favour of an once offended God) let us ever adore that Saviour *by whom peace is proclaimed on earth, and good will to men*^k. For be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not have been justified^l, not only by the informations of reason, but even by the law of Moses. But did Christ die that sin might abound? God forbid. No; he died, not only that the guilt of sin might be washed away, but also that the power of sin might be subdued in the hearts of his followers; for tho' he is merciful to every penitent, he is a consuming fire to all the workers of iniquity.

2. If, besides all natural advantages, God hath vouchsafed to us the superior blessings of revelation for our information and direction, what manner of men ought we to be? If Felix, a heathen and an ido-

^k Luke ii. 14.

^l Acts xiii. 38, 39.

later, trembled at the words of an apostle for his violations of the laws of righteousness and temperance, how much more should we, if we are guilty of the like transgressions? If the natural dread of a future judgment had so great influence upon his mind, what emotions ought the clear revelations of it which we enjoy, to excite in our breasts? To us God hath given full assurance, that *he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained*^m. Ought not then the convictions of a future retribution, supported by the force of God's authority, the express declarations of his word, as well as the admonitions of your own consciences, to excite you to forsake every sin? Let him that defrauded his neighbour, defraud him no more; let the drunkard forsake his strong drink, and live temperately. Let the licentious abandon pleasure, and follow Christ; for he that saith, that he loveth Christ, and yet doth not obey his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

^m Acts xvii. 31.

S E R M O N V.

P S A L M lxxiii. 28.

But it is good for me to draw near to God.

Partial views of human life, and hasty opinions of the events which occur in it, often occasion much fluctuation of mind, and uncertainty of conduct, by giving rise to sentiments of infidelity and distrust in relation to the superintendence and rectitude of providence. The reception which those views meet with, strongly marks the character of the mind; for the views themselves, to people who are accustomed to think, are at times almost unavoidable. It appears from this psalm, that the writer of it had been deeply distressed with them, and with the dark prospects which they presented; in so much that, on some occasions, they even tempted him to regard virtue as a name, and piety as a shadow. *Verily I have cleansed my*

heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. But to a virtuous mind, the anguish of the impression prepares for its cure. In this situation, the venerable and complacent form of religion steps in to our aid. By her words, equally fraught with sublimity and sweetness, she elevates the dejected soul, and pours into the festered heart the balm of divine consolation. The sanctuary of God was the place where the Psalmist expected to have his doubts cleared, and his anxieties removed. Thither therefore he goes; and there religion opens to him such extensive and soothing discoveries, as entirely dispel his painful thoughts. By the meditations which she suggests, he regains his former serenity and firmness, and acquires that confidence in the administration and protection of the Almighty, which is always so highly agreeable, but which few thoughtful men of sensibility are able invariably to maintain. The tenor of these meditations we may observe from the 17th verse to the end of this psalm. The words of my text

contain a calm and deliberate reflection of the Psalmist, as the result of a perfect consideration of his subject, and will afford very suitable matter for our instruction at this time.

To draw near to God, primarily denotes those approaches which the Israelites made by means of their priests, to the visible symbol of the divine presence they had in the temple, in order to ask counsel of the Lord, and to receive answers respecting the expressions of their piety, and the regulation of their conduct. Upon such occasions, they always intermingled acts of devotion: and as in these, the sense of the divine presence is more immediate and lively, the phrase came naturally to signify all religious acts, and exercises of the mind. In this sense, it seems principally used in the text. That it denotes religious acts in general, appears also from the character which God gives of the Israelites in the 29th chapter of Isaiah, the 13th verse; *This people draw near me with*

their mouth, and with their lips do honour me: That is, they are punctual in the observance of the external forms and ceremonies of worship. When the primary and most proper sense of a phrase is lost, it often happens, that the secondary and more figurative acceptation remains. Accordingly in the New Testament, when the Jewish œconomy was wholly altered, and there was no room left for a literal application of the words in question, they are, both in the epistle to the Hebrews, and the epistle of James, adopted to signify acts of christian devotion; and as they are expressive of the operation and feelings of our minds, they signify these more strongly than any language would do that were entirely stripped of metaphor and figure.

The text then furnishes a proper foundation for considering the advantages of devotion in general; and the consideration of these shall constitute the subject of this discourse.

When I speak of the advantages which attend the religious acts of the mind, it is perhaps superfluous to say, that I understand these acts to be sincere and well intended. Sincerity and good intention are essentially requisite in all the duties of piety and morality. They distinguish the christian from the formalist: they recommend the timorous prayer of the humble publican, while the want of them renders the pompous declarations of the proud pharisee frivolous and vain. In these circumstances lies the difference between the zeal of Peter, and the kiss of Judas; between the tearful eye and downcast heart of the beloved disciple standing at a distance, and the mock honours paid to our Saviour by a servile multitude. Is it necessary to add, that religious acts and exercises can be of no consequence or utility farther than a man's temper and conduct are correspondent to them? That ceremonies should compensate for immoralities; that a transient devotion should atone for vicious habits; that he who

prosper by the wages of iniquity and the gains of oppression, or who without restraint gratifies any appetite or any passion, should meet with acceptance from his maker, on the account of any rites and forms of religion whatever, are suppositions alike absurd and impious. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination*^a; and the only possible aggravation of his guilt is when he offers up his prayer with a wicked heart.

Having said thus much to prevent mistakes, I proceed to consider the advantages which attend the religious acts and exercises of the mind. *It is good for me to draw near to God.*

In the first place, they are accompanied with a sensible pleasure and self-approbation.

One thing in this world is set over against another. Every thing is relative,

^a Prov. xxviii. 9.

and there must be some comparison before we can pronounce concerning pleasure or pain, good or evil. The gratifications of life arise to man from the consonance between certain powers of his mind, and certain objects that are adapted to them. Thus far hath the God of nature provided for our enjoyment. If those gratifications are perceived and relished, we pronounce the mind to be in a healthful state: if not, we reckon it diseased, and the fault lies not in man's original frame, but in his own unnatural and vicious perversion of it. Thus we feel, and thus we judge. By the pleasure, then, and self-approbation which accompany the exercises of devotion, I mean those agreeable sensations, and that delightful consciousness which they produce in well regulated spirits, and which every man who has the least candour remaining, though he has so far perverted his own mind as not to possess them, must acknowledge to have a strong foundation in nature. That they have such foundation will appear whether

we consider the faculties that are employed in the acts of devotion, the object to whom they are directed, or the emotions which accompany them.

In the exercises of devotion our highest faculties are employed. By our capacity to recognize a superior hand directing the affairs of the universe, we are distinguished from every other creature in this lower world. The sun shines upon the beasts of the field, and upon the birds of the air, as well as upon man. The general influences of heaven cheer and animate them. The earth affords them shelter and sustenance. They share with us many pleasures, and are affected with many similar pains; but man alone perceives an invisible and over-ruling power, putting every thing in motion, and directing every thing to its proper end. By skill and culture, it is possible to train some other creatures to an imitation of many human actions, and greatly to improve their natural sagacity; but to transport them for an instant into

the region of invisible things, transcends the utmost efforts of human ability. The conclusion most natural and most familiar to man, which, had it not been for the corruption of his heart, or the refinements of false philosophy, he had never lost sight of, is, That a God exists; a conclusion impossible to be taught by art to inferior animals. In the exertion then of this prerogative shall man find no delight? Hath the Deity stamped his own image upon us, and made us able to discern his attributes; and hath he annexed no pleasure to this deduction of our reason, or to this feeling of our hearts, and the impressions connected with either? Believe not, my brethren, that God hath dealt so unequally, so partially with the creatures of his hand. It is our dignity, it is our privilege, to be susceptible of the impressions of religion; and in vain shall we pursue substantial joys, if we exclude this as a considerable source of them. The ox feels no want while he feeds in rich pastures, the bee sucks the fragrant flower impregnated with the dew

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of heaven, and asks for nothing more. The birds of the air gather the grain which the liberal hand of heaven scatters, and pour forth the notes of unallayed delight. But man, the master of the world, pines for something more. The universe is too little for him, and nothing less than God, nothing lower than the views which religion presents, and the affections which it inspires, can satisfy his all-grasping mind.

We are made for contemplating great and magnificent objects with pleasure. A mountain, a river, the sea, the heavens, attract the attention of the most uncultivated spirit. Heroic deeds, noble sentiments, extensive schemes are surveyed with pleasure, and recorded with admiration by every people upon the face of the earth; but the grandeur of every material or mental object that the universe can furnish, fades and disappears when we raise our thoughts to the source and standard of all greatness. The greatness of every other object is comparative and derived; the greatness of God

absolute and original. In his eye the earth is a spot, the mountains atoms, the heavens a curtain, the most exalted human excellence imperfection.

But further, the feelings which the acts of devotion give scope to, are all of the noblest and most amiable kind, and therefore from our very constitution accompanied with the most sensible delight. In devotion we not only contemplate with admiration the ever-living cause of all perfection and felicity, but with gratitude we acknowledge his beneficence to us. All gloomy and desponding ideas disappear, and we confide in that power which raised us from the dust, and made us rational and immortal creatures. The love of our hearts is the natural tribute to the goodness that creates and sustains worlds without number, and living beings beyond calculation. The hope of immortality irradiates our minds, and we rejoice in the government of him with whom *a thousand years are but as one*

day° Is it possible to indulge sentiments like these, and to derive no pleasure from them? Search the world, and tell me if there are any subjects so fit to employ, or so calculated to please the human mind. We were made for pleasure, we feel the desire of it interwoven with our inmost frame. The man that says he despises it, is a liar. Place it only on the right object: seek it not in gold: it is not annexed to temporal power: sensual delights are but a phantom. Our true joy is not here. It is risen: it is with God. It is more precious than rubies, more valuable than hidden treasures. Let us aspire after it, and gratify our souls by giving scope to the most virtuous and most exalted feelings of our hearts. Let reverence, gratitude, love, adoration demonstrate to us that we were made for something nobler than to grovel upon this earth, and to sigh after its deceitful enjoyments.

• 2 Pet. iii. 8.

In the second place, The advantages which attend the religious exercises of the mind appear from the influence they have upon the temper and conduct, both respecting society and ourselves.

I will not say that there can be no morality where there is no piety, because different parts of our frame answers to these different branches of our duty; and a perversion of one part does not infer an annihilation of the other. But in every case where piety is wanting, morality has lost its surest and best support. It is also worthy of observation, that the more extensive our theatre of action is, and the more cultivated some of the powers of our minds are, the more we stand in need of piety in order to preserve the purity and integrity of our hearts. A savage who scarcely thinks of God, is not in such danger of transgressing the social duties of his narrow sphere, as the civilized citizen who proves without argument that religion is an imposture, and believes without reason that devotion is hypocrisy. In the contracted situation of the

savage, to yield to the impulses and instincts of nature, constitutes the most important part of his duty and business. In the case of the civilized citizen, to render his social conduct worthy of approbation, it must be grafted upon principles that correspond to his more enlarged views and more extensive connections. Our desires, our wants, our hopes, our fears, our capacities for virtue, and our propensities to vice, increase with the improvement of our knowledge, and our advancement in all the arts of polished life. Now to restrain those propensities to vice, to cultivate those capacities for virtue, to resist temptations so multiplied, and to regulate such various impulses, the aids of religion become absolutely necessary. In fact, how few men, who have no principles of piety, are strictly observant of the duties of social and domestic life? Honour, custom, humanity, pride, natural temper, prove restraints in many instances. But such restraints are weak, partial, and confined. A man truly conscientious is ashamed to hear those encomiums which

it is fashionable to lavish on the man of honour and humanity, as he is called, who is nevertheless unfaithful to his wife, or careless about his children, who triumphs in the ruin of female innocence, and esteems the tie of friendship no defence against injuries of the blackest nature. I believe there are many merchants who have no fixed principles of religion, that will not forge bills, or falsify accompts, that will be regular correspondents and just dealers, that will tell honestly the quality of their goods, and be punctual to a day in their payments. This is their duty and their interest; so far they do well, and piety if it could be possessed in this employment without these qualities, would never compensate for the want of them. But do these qualities constitute a man of virtue and integrity in all the social relations of life? Or if he transgresses one of the duties of those relations, will these qualities give him the least compunction of mind on this account? Suppose I were assured of his possessing all these, should I be the less

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fearful of coming within his power, if I had offended or hurt him, however innocently? To a man who is above the arts of dishonesty, how sweet very often is the morsel of revenge! He is an unexceptionably good man, as it is called upon the exchange, yet his servants may feel the severity of his temper, his dependants may groan under the rod of his oppression, and his poor neighbours may be sick or starve without engaging his assistance, or exciting his compassion. When we descend to the lower stations of life; if they have lost all regard for religion, what expectation can we entertain of their virtue or sobriety? Fawning to their superiors and employers; but almost always tyrannical or ill-tempered at home: pilferers to increase their substance; and yet almost for ever intemperate and debauched in the use of it: given to fraud in every instance where they can gain by it; yet almost continually plunged by their vices into poverty and wretchedness.

On the other hand, is there not a natural tendency in the spirit of devotion to improve the character in every good quality respecting our private conduct? What can more powerfully enlarge and ennoble the mind, than the contemplation and adoration of God? What can more vigorously prompt to the exercise of the social affections, than the consideration that they are implanted in us by the common parent, and that a regard to them is our duty as his children? What can more effectually impress a sense of the dignity of temperance, and the meanness of debauchery, than a reflection on our divine original, and a view of our immortal prospects?

These, one should think, are the natural fruits of a pious disposition: But when it is further considered, that all the duties of morality, love, candour, forgiveness, condescension, humanity, charity, temperance, are expressly commanded in the scripture, and particularly recommended by an example that cannot fail to have the strongest

influence upon the mind of a real christian, that the same authority which enjoins us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, enjoins us also to love our neighbour as ourselves, can we be so blind as not to perceive an intimate connection between these different branches of our duty? Are we disposed to adore the perfections of God, and acknowledge the authority of God? And will sentiments of this kind seriously entertained and frequently repeated have no influence but in those moments when they are present to the mind? Or will they not give some tincture to the temper and behaviour? Will the contemplation of perfect excellence raise no desire after obtaining a portion of it? Will frequent views of the vanity of time and the importance of eternity have no effect in subduing pride, in restraining impatience, and in arming with fortitude? Will all the considerations that are mentioned in the new testament, of our being the children of God, the temples of the Holy Ghost, the brethren of Christ Jesus, the heirs of his promises, the expect-

tants of his glory; will all these be of no use in engaging us to purify our minds, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world?

But fact is the great decider of all disputes. If it appears from fact, that the exercises of devotion are nowise subservient to the good conduct of this life, let them be confined to those who consider them as a fit preparation for another: but if the reverse be found true, let all who are solicitous about the most valuable interests of the present life be sensible of their importance.

If a reasoner, to show the little use of piety, should urge, as is frequently done in questions of this kind, some examples of great external appearances of devotion, where the characters which exhibit them are yet tainted with avarice, injustice, intemperance; and should exult in this as a proof that devotion hath no influence on practice, I must certainly entertain a poor opinion

of his discernment. The question is not about the effects of an appearance of piety, but about the effects of piety itself. Surely experience teaches us to distinguish between appearances and realities: and indeed a great external show of devotion, except in people of weak understandings and warm passions, gives rather a presumption of the want of that quality than of the possession of it. Were we to dispute about the weight of gold, would it be fair to present a gilt counter to prove its lightness? But the universal sense and judgment of the world about the characters of the men we are here speaking of, evidently show there is a real foundation for asserting that true devotion has a natural tendency to improve, in every respect, the moral character. For, if it has no such tendency, why should every human creature express a peculiar indignation against the vices of such men? For what reason should they consider those vices as so highly aggravated? Why should the impious wretch hold up his face, and say that he is not so bad as the man who pre-

tends to piety, and yet treads in the same steps with himself? Thus the mouth of such reasoners condemns them, and their own lips testify against them.

Again; if particular instances of moral virtue should be taken notice of in men who have had little sense of devotion, and yet have appeared equal or perhaps superior in those instances to many who have been unquestionably actuated by that principle; neither is this any thing to the purpose. Character does not consist in separate and detached efforts, but in an uniform or prevailing tenor of life. Great allowances are to be made for natural dispositions, for original differences in judgment, imagination, affection. Even the devotional spirit does not surmount every obstacle, and conquer every temptation. The man of piety may yield to a passion which never actuated a worse man. But stating the case fairly, and that is, supposing the force of virtuous propensities and of vicious inclination equal in any two men, which of the

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two would improve most in the former, and be at greatest pains to restrain the latter? The man that fears God, or the man that fears him not? Which of the two would feel most compunction upon a deviation from rectitude, or most anxiety to recover the right path? I might appeal to your own judgments: I might almost appeal to the judgments of the vicious. But experience, as I hinted before, is the great decider of all disputes. If there be, as it is certain there are, a great variety of instances in which men filled with the spirit of devotion have been found blameless in their lives, and conspicuous for the purity of their morals, while they ascribed these attainments to that very spirit of devotion, and those influences of divine grace which are inseparably connected with it, must not this be acknowledged decisive upon the point? Were we to select particular instances, I should mention the prophets and apostles, great numbers of the primitive christians, some of the first reformers. Some of the most opposite principles in other respects

might be ranked with them. Even several heathens might be considered as examples of the truth of our doctrine, and in that list I should particularly distinguish a Socrates and an Antoninus.

In the third place; The advantages which attend the religious exercises of the mind will appear, when we consider them as a resource under the evils and calamities of life, and a solace under the most distressful circumstances that can befall us.

There can be no greater folly, nor any more certain source of disappointment, than inattention to the general lot of humanity. If we consider life in itself, without taking into the account the means which providence and religion furnish for rendering it more easy and agreeable, the most melancholy descriptions of it are scarcely overcharged. Helpless in infancy, thoughtless in childhood, rash in youth, headstrong in manhood, feeble in declining years, decrepit in old age; in every stage liable to accidents, to diseases, to dissolution. Thus

surrounded with a thousand evils, can we expect to be happy, if we have no higher refuge than this world affords? It is not in human power to avoid the pang of sorrow sometimes; and if we have no consolation when it comes, it will perfectly overwhelm us. The pains, the distempers, the disappointments, the injuries from men, the reverses of fortune, the loss of friends, the nameless calamities to which we are daily subject, who can tell how many or how grievous they may prove? Ah think, what multitudes are this day, from events unforeseen and unavoidable, plunged in bitterness of soul, who lately thought that their mountain stood strong, and that their houses should never be moved! Mirth does well for a season, but the house of mourning is upon some occasions appointed for all the children of men. Need I, in proof of this, recur to the instances of Job, of the prophets, of the apostles? Need I mention the fall of tyrants, the catastrophe of empires, the havock made by the pestilence, or the ravages by the sword? Indeed, my bre-

—thren, the soul of man feels that *man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards*, that *he consumes his days in vanity*, and *his years in trouble*; and if he should deny it with his mouth, his heart would give him the lie. But where shall he find consolation under these afflictions, if he has not previously acquainted himself with God? On the contrary, what solacing reflections will break in upon his mind from the principles of piety, and the acts of devotion? How powerfully will these assuage the bitterness of anguish, and check the sentiments of despondence! From this source a secret joy will spring up in the heart, when the tears of grief are falling upon other accounts. Let not the young and the gay imagine that mournful scenes are at a distance. No person can tell how near they may be; and wisdom consists in preparing for what sooner or later will probably happen to us all.

I shall conclude with two passages of scripture that are much to our present purpose, and serve to shew the unconquerable

power of piety amidst the greatest calamities. The former is David's triumph in the midst of public danger and distress: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swellings thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved; he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge^p. The other is the conclusion of Habakkuk's hymn: *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in**

^p Psalm xlvii. 1. 7.

the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength^a. Thus blessed is the man, O God, whom thou causest to approach unto thee^r. To God, therefore, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith^s.

^a Hab. iii. 17. 19. ^r Psalm lxxv. 4. ^s Heb. x. 22.

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MATTHEW xxii. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

IN the preceding verses we are told that a young lawyer, with a view either to inform himself of the knowledge and abilities of Jesus as an instructor, or to obtain some answer which might give occasion to traduce him to the people, asks him this question; *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?* The words which I have now read, contain our Saviour's reply, which is so agreeable to reason, and to the express doctrine recorded in the Old Testament, that, as we see from the parallel place in the evangelist Mark, this young man, who seems not to have been destitute of candour and ingenuity,

freely owned its truth, and applauded Jesus for it. I need scarcely inform any of you, that these expressions of loving God *with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind*, are only intended to denote the warmth, the vigour, and the steadiness of the affection. But though the precept be very easily understood, and though Christians are ever ready to join in this enquiry, and to say, *Master, thou hast answered well*, yet it must be acknowledged, that many of those who call themselves Christians, seldom seriously consider its high importance among the precepts of religion. They rarely feel the force of the principle which it inculcates actuating their hearts; and consequently are strangers to its powerful and extensive influence. In discoursing therefore from these words, I shall 1st. show the reasonableness, and endeavour to impress your hearts with a sense of the duty here commanded, love to God.

2dly, I shall consider some of the reasons, on account of which the precept enjoining it may be termed *the first and great commandment*.

First. I propose to shew the reasonableness, and to endeavour to impress your hearts with a sense of the duty here commanded, love to God. When we consider the constitution of the human mind, we must acknowledge, that whatever is upon the whole conformable to that constitution, is reasonable. The indulgence of human desire is only then wrong and unreasonable, when the desire is perverted, or when the indulgence is forbidden by some power or faculty, which is superior or more excellent. Now love is one of the affections of the soul, one of those original principles which man has received from the hand of his Creator. Its natural and proper object is whatever is good, amiable, or worthy in character. The observation of such qualities necessarily excites this affection; and when exercised upon these, the most exalted and

divine powers of the mind consent in giving it their sanction.

When we observe any person remarkable for integrity, or any person whose delight is to do good, and to spread happiness, is it in our power to with-hold our approbation? Is not our love a tribute, which we are obliged to pay? When Job fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered consolation to the distressed; when, in his own expressive language, *he became eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame*^a, how natural was it, that love and admiration should prompt the young and the old to join in blessing him; and how readily do the same sensations spring up in our breasts when we read his history? The king who is willing to die, if his people be but spared; the hero who bravely sacrifices his life for his country; the patriot whose constant toils are employed to save a sinking land, are, even supposing the influence of their actions should not extend to us,

^a Job xxix. 15.

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the genuine objects of love and veneration.

But by the appointment of providence our affections are most strongly excited by objects with which we have the most immediate connection. Where goodness or worth appear to be exercised for promoting our advantage, they most quickly raise, and most firmly attach our love.

Have you the happiness of possessing one whom the world calls your friend, and whose actions correspond to that sacred name; who shares, and by sharing redoubles your joys, who advises you when doubts overwhelm you, who smooths the brow of care, and partakes in all your afflictions? Have you a friend of this character? Or if you have parents who reared you with the utmost tenderness, to whom you were dear as life, what affections do you feel arising in your breasts when you think of them? are they not those of love, and of gratitude, which is nearly allied to

love? It is just as natural to expect these in every human mind in such circumstances, as to expect from a field properly cultivated, warmed by the kindest influences of heaven, and watered by its gentlest showers, a plentiful return of that seed which is sown in it. Is it not reasonable then, nay, is it not unavoidable to love men, when they are conspicuous for good dispositions and acts of beneficence?

Suppose now that the sphere of man's influence were extended, and that the imperfection which attends him thro' all the steps of life were removed, would he not thus be rendered more amiable, and consequently be the object of the greater love? As God therefore is not only the most powerful and the wisest, but likewise the best of beings, whose goodness is infinite, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works*^b, does he not justly challenge the utmost degree of love? This truth is no sooner proposed than it is acknowledged

^b Psalm cxlv. 9.

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by christians. But to make not only the understanding to perceive it, but the heart also to feel it, let us more particularly consider that perfection of the divine nature, and those exertions of it, which are fit for enflaming the affection. And, O Father of mercy, while I humbly attempt to delineate a portion of thy goodness, let thy grace influence all our hearts, so as to produce that love to thee which is the ornament of man here, and in which consists his perfection and happiness hereafter.

As I speak to an assembly who profess themselves disciples of Jesus, I shall at present omit the arguments that tend to establish those facts of which you already are sufficiently persuaded. Let us then, my brethren, stretch our imaginations to the utmost, and contemplate, as well as our narrow faculties will permit, that exalted and infinite Being who has no wants to supply. View him from eternal ages, enjoying perfect felicity, and incapable of any addition of glory. Yet behold at once an act

of the most unexampled power, and of the most disinterested goodness. He commands, and numberless worlds arise, replenished with life, and stored with the means of happiness. Those worlds which his power and his goodness at first formed, his goodness and his power still preserve, and from the unexhaustible source of his bounty, all the blessings that are possessed by the various orders of beings, thro' the boundless extent of space, are solely derived. Could the eye of man survey all these worlds, or his understanding comprehend them, how reasonable is it to expect that they would all consent, both in declaring the glory, and proclaiming the goodness of their Author! But as it is only a small part of his works which we can comprehend, let us, my brethren, consider that small part with which we are best acquainted, and take notice of some of the most obvious instances of divine goodness.

Observe how the influences of the sun, and the rains which descend from heaven,

to-operate with other means in occasioning that never-ceasing fertility of this earth, by which provision is made for the necessities of man, and of every creature that inhabits it. Does not reason, as well as religion, teach us to attribute this to the continued energy of nature's sovereign? Both inform us, that *the eyes of all things wait upon God. That he openeth his liberal hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing*^c. The grateful variations of day and night, the time for action, and the time for repose, he constituted them. The useful changes of the seasons are of his appointment. The mutual connection and subserviency of the different animals, and their general subjection to man, proceed from his contrivance. Were I able, or did time permit, what an ample fund for discourse is here? All the works of nature, the air which we breathe, the light which directs us, the earth which yields us food, the water so necessary for our refreshment, so useful for the commerce of life; all, when considered in connection

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^c Psalm cxlv. 15, 16.

with the living creatures for whose support they are intended, present us with so many distinct proofs of the goodness of their creator. *Marvellous are thy works, Lord God almighty*^d. The heavens and the earth shew forth thy praise. In their continual revolutions, their voice to him that hath understanding is, The goodness of our author and preserver is unsearchable. But I hasten to trace some of the marks of it with relation to man in particular. Who then bestowed upon thee, O man, that living and immortal soul of which thou art possessor? Did not the almighty give it; a ray of his own lustre, a particle of divinity to dwell within thee, and direct thee? What constant exertion of the same goodness, my beloved brethren, has been requisite to preserve those souls with which God has indued us? Through the journey of life, who has cared for you, and conducted you? When you first saw the light, you entered upon a scene beset with temptations, surrounded with dangers, and exposed on every side

^d Revel. xy. 3.

to storms and tempests. To all these, by your ignorance, inexperience, weakness, rashness, you have been a thousand times laid open. A ship this hour lies safe in the harbour; the sailors are all asleep. By some unforeseen accident the cables break, and upon a dangerous coast, the vessel is driven out to the raging sea, whose billows every moment are ready to overwhelm her, or dash her against the rocks; yet so deep a sleep hath seized the men, that none awake. This is an emblem, tho' a faint one, of many of the dangers of human life: and what but the watchful care of the universal Parent could preserve us in the midst of them?

But can you reflect upon no particular known, and striking interpositions of providence in your favour? Did you never in any instance see yourself so involved, that human aid (tho' even this is to be ascribed to God) could not have extricated you, and has not the deity appeared to relieve you? Was you never oppressed with

such sickness and affliction, that your friends and your physicians have given up every hope of your recovery, and yet you are alive at this day? Are there no parents here, who have despaired of their dearest child, whom yet God has been pleased to restore to them? Is there no husband who had the immediate prospect of shedding tears on the grave of the wife of his bosom, who yet lives in happiness with him? Is there no faithful and affectionate wife, who yet retains the father of those children, whom her fears have represented overwhelmed with want, and plunged in calamity, when she thought she saw death striking the fatal blow, which nothing but the divine goodness prevented? Observe well your circumstances. Are you possessed of power, blessed with riches, and favoured with health, happy in your friends, beyond the reach of your enemies? To whose favour do you owe all these mercies? Who hath exempted you from adding one to the numerous family of the poor, the afflicted, the oppressed,

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and the disconsolate? Ye sons of joy, amidst your prosperity, observe the hand which raised you up; adore and love his goodness.

But the world and all its blessings fade and disappear, when I survey the miraculous display of mercy, which this sacred book exhibits. Suppose, my brethren, that some person, who possesses a very large share of external enjoyments, whom his fellow mortals rank among the few that are happy: but whose views, as he is destitute of the light of the gospel, were mostly confined to the present life, and as to futurity, were dark, confused, and uncertain, were to sit down and seriously consider his condition; would he not naturally entertain such reflections as these? I possess many of the enjoyments of life which I see denied to numbers like myself. I possess ease, and often enjoy pleasure, while others are oppressed with labours, and tormented with pain. But in one thing I am on a level with the mean-

est: I must die as well as they. From undergoing this common lot of humanity, all my possessions cannot redeem me. When I die, whither I shall go I know not; but experience informs me, that, wheresoever it is, nothing which I presently call mine can accompany me. I feel my own mind often disquieted by committing actions which I disapprove, and for which I greatly dread the displeasure of the Author of my being, to whom I perceive myself accountable. When I leave life, perhaps his indignation, hitherto suspended, may break out, and who knows how miserable I may be? This damps all my present joys, and how willingly would I part with all I have, in order to be ascertained of happiness in that state which will succeed the present, and which in all probability will last much longer? Christian, learn to prize thy happiness in being the disciple of a Master, who came to free thy mind from such uneasy reflections. For when involved in misery there was no eye to pity us, providence

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Interposed, and the scheme which to providence seemed fittest for accomplishing man's salvation, was by the sacrifice of the Son of God. At the appointed time, Jesus, *the brightness of his Father's glory**, in whom dwelt the wisdom of the most high, assumes our nature, appears among mankind, reveals a religion the most pure and the most perfect, and at last, to propitiate the justice of his Father, and to seal the truth of his religion, expires upon the cross. Reflect upon the advantages which you derive from the religion of Jesus: acceptance with God, the pardon of transgression, peace of mind, and the hopes of everlasting felicity, and all this upon the easy terms of trusting in God, acting like men, and living in conformity to reason and conscience. To persuade you to such a behaviour, what motives hath not Jesus laid before you? How plainly hath he delivered his laws? how strongly hath he enforced them? by what a perfect, and

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* Heb. i. 3.

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amiable example doth he excite you ? and how frequently hath he assured you that the assistance of his Spirit is given to those who ask it ?

Of purpose till now I deferred considering the evils of life, as an objection against the goodness of God, because the objection is most briefly and most satisfactorily answered from the christian religion. Do you then mourn under misfortunes opposite to the blessings I formerly mentioned, under poverty, oppression, loss of your dearest friends, sickness, and pain ? See your Master suffering the greatest troubles, and yet not complaining : and shall the servant repine, when his lord shares his fate ? But farther, from the lectures of Jesus, observe what he hath often declared : *I go to prepare a place*^f of repose and felicity for every follower, who patiently, as I did, endures the troubles of life. The righteous, tho' numbered among the

^f John xiv. 2, 3.

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dead, shall live with me, and their righteous friends shall meet them here, where the second death hath no power. To every sincere christian in this house hear him farther proclaiming in effect: The fleeting days of human life, my friends and followers, consider only as the entry to a divine and immortal life. I have marked out the road to glory. I have opened the gate of this heavenly kingdom. Struggle thro' the toils of a day, and an eternity of bliss with me your Master shall be your reward. Let worldly disappointments and losses teach you submission to your heavenly Father; let the blessings of life teach you gratitude. Lo here is the place where sorrow is no more, where tears are never shed, where friends never part, and where gratitude and love kindle such a flame in the human mind as is at once most pleasing to God, and delightful to man.

Has God, my brethren, given us his own son, and through his merits have we acces

to immortality? What is there then that is truly good for us which he will refuse us, after this proof of his mercy? Can you consider the supreme Being in those engaging lights, as your father, your friend, your surest guide thro' the temptations, dangers and difficulties of life, and your conductor to the mansions of everlasting felicity; and not be ready to own the reasonableness of love to him? Surely you do own it. But, christians, this is not sufficient. Do you feel it too? Does it now burn within you? Can you say with sincerity, My soul, O God, is thy workmanship, and with my whole soul I love thee!

If you are thus disposed, you will readily enter into the latter part of this discourse, which was designed to point out some of the reasons on account of which love to God may be termed the first and great commandment.

1st. It may be termed so, when we consider the feeling itself and its object. The

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former has something in it so disinterested, so generous, and noble, that experience teaches us (let the lovers of God bear witness) it gives an emotion unspeakably pleasing to the soul. It is the affection which, when regulated aright, is freer from alloy than any other. Fear damps the ardour of the mind, Humility gives it pain. Even gratitude itself, which I ever venerate, is attended with a sense of numerous wants. But love elevates the mind, expands the soul, takes us off from considering ourselves at all, and fixes us solely upon its object. And what is its object? Not power; for power may be unjustly exercised: not even wisdom; for wisdom may be sometimes employed in contriving the means of punishment; but goodness, and benevolence, and the highest degrees of these perfections, as they are exhibited in the character of the supreme mind.

2dly, The great importance of love to God will appear, if we consider its effects. When this principle reigns in the mind,

will it not produce universal obedience? What thro' the gospel of Jesus is always recorded as the natural effect, and what is always required as the surest proof of our loving God? Is it not obedience to his laws? *If ye love me, keep my commandments^s. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you^h. He that bath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth meⁱ.* It cannot be otherwise. If we regard him as the best of beings, and love him as such, will we repine at any affliction of his appointment? Thus resignation is grafted on love. If this affection prevails in us, will we account any labour hard, any piece of duty too severe? Thus it becomes the parent of fortitude and patience. In one word, point out to me the man who is sincerely a lover of his Maker, I can assure you he venerates his laws, and tho' the infirmities of nature prevail sometimes over him, in general he obeys them.

^s John xiv. 15. ^h John xv. 14. ⁱ John xiv. 21.

Finally, Love to God is of the highest importance, as it is of the most extensive duration. There are many of the virtues and graces of the christian life which are designed only for the present state of mankind: the future state will not admit of their exercise. Here the wicked are ready to provoke and injure, and the christian ready to forgive and bless. Here faith must be cultivated as the firmest support of goodness and integrity of life: But there vision will come in its place. There the society will consist only of the good; the objects of resentment shall never be perceived, and where there can be no provocation there is no scope for forgiveness. Even the fear of God, while the vail of mortality prevents us from a more complete knowledge of him, continues to be mixed with something of the dread, which, when we shall see him as he is, beneficent, gracious, and all benign, shall be ever excluded. But love shall ever abide, and ever increase in the human mind. God

hath here planted the seed; the kindly influences of religion foster it. The cares of the world and the storms of life retard its growth; but in the hearts of good men it continues, tho' slowly, still to grow. At the death of the most pious it is only a tender plant; but when we shall arrive in happier climes, where no clouds overshadow the sun of righteousness, it shall take deeper root, and flourish with immortal verdure.

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M A T T H E W xxii. 39.

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love
thy neighbour as thyself.*

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they resemble God, and shall be called his children; for ever blessed be the Saviour of mankind, who not only was, while he dwelt upon this earth, the greatest peace-maker himself, but also published a religion which was to descend to latest ages, the design of which is to expel enmity out of the world, and to make every man to consider his fellow-creature as his brother, and regard him with the same affection with which he regards himself.

In the verses preceding the text, a lawyer having enquired of our Saviour, *What is the first and great commandment?* he informs him, that it is to love God sincerely, fer-

vently, and constantly, and that next to this the duty most important, is to love our neighbour. By our neighbour, according to the sentiments of our divine Lawgiver, is not to be understood, those only who live in the same corner, or country, who are governed by the same laws, and subject to the same polity, but all who are connected by the same common tie of humanity. It is the command of this lawgiver, that we abound in love to all men, that we offer up supplications for them, and that we do good to every person as far as we have opportunity, *especially to those that are of the household of faith.* Prejudices arising from education, from opposition of interest, from differences in religion, in the disciples of Jesus, must not restrain that universal good will, which it is the very spirit of Christ's religion to promote. By his laws the Jews and Samaritans, tho' trained up with a peculiar degree of mutual rancour, were to consider each other as neighbours and brethren. Thus every good christian

is what the philosopher calls himself, a citizen of the world. Engraven upon his heart in indelible characters, which you may read in the tenor of his life, are piety and reverence to God, and love and friendship to the human race.

The law of universal benevolence prescribed in the text, is indeed intended to comprehend those private, but not less powerful affections, which regard a country, kindred, friends, benefactors, children, and the poor, from whence arise the virtues of patriotism, natural affection, gratitude, charity. Benevolence then may be considered as a leading principle of human nature, upon which all these are grafted. It may be compared to a venerable parent, whose numerous offspring bear a strong resemblance to him, and are at once vigorous, healthy, and graceful.

But in order to give you still a more clear conception of the precept now before us, let us take notice of some of the

most striking features in the character of that man who obeys it. The benevolent man wishes well to all; and tho' his own power is confined, he recommends them to that power that is unlimited. At the happiness of his fellow-creatures he rejoices, and he is grieved for their misery. He shows the genuineness of these dispositions, by partaking in the joy of his acquaintance who happen to be successful, and by mingling his tears with those of the children of calamity. This fellow-feeling is not all. He uses his utmost efforts to promote the happiness of all within his sphere, and to prevent, or alleviate their sorrow. Not to defraud, or overreach, is but the least part of the praise which he deserves. In his commerce with men, those rules which others observe by constraint, and from dread of the law, he observes from inclination, from a pure heart and a good conscience. This is the character of a truly benevolent man. The benevolent christian attains a greater perfection in all these virtues by a steady imi-

tation of that inexpressibly benevolent Mediator, who went about continually doing good, encouraging innocent chearfulness, wiping the tear from the eye of sorrow, restoring health to the diseased, and by every method promoting the temporal and spiritual advantage of mankind.

Having thus explained the precept of loving our neighbour, I shall endeavour in the first place to point out the reasonableness of it. 2dly, Make some remarks upon the degree of this virtue required by our Saviour, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*; and then endeavour to persuade you to the practice of it. May this discourse proceed from a heart overflowing with benevolence, and prove a mean of impressing you with, or establishing you in this important grace of the gospel!

In the first place, as briefly as possible, I shall endeavour to point out the reasonableness of the duty, the love of our neighbour. To discern the reasonableness of any duty

there is no more needful, but a comparison of the nature of the being on whom the duty is enjoined, with the duty itself; and if it be found agreeable and congruous to that nature, it may be pronounced fit and reasonable. Now the most superficial view of human nature plainly discovers that benevolence is one of those principles of which it is compounded. It does not appear more evident that the eye is made for seeing, and the ear for hearing, than that the heart of man is so constituted, as to have an attachment to his fellow-creatures. If we saw a person take delight in hurting others, and involving them in misery without being prompted by any particular passion, but solely for the pleasure of doing ill, and becoming the author of misery, we should not hesitate to pronounce that person monstrous and unnatural. On the other hand, take any man and place him in society, we always expect that where no contrary passion that is more powerful interferes, he will be ready to delight in, and do good to the members of that socie-

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ty; and this without further view, than obeying the simple dictates of his own mind. Read the history of mankind, or narrowly observe the actions which occur every day, and I think there is no possibility of understanding many scenes in the former, or of comprehending many appearances of the latter, without supposing a principle of direct benevolence (that is, good-will to mankind) implanted in the human mind by its great Creator, abstracted from every view of private interest, or even of public utility, into which some have vainly endeavoured to resolve it.

What has been said is applicable not only to the general principle, but likewise to the particular virtues into which it may be branched out; such as love of our country, natural affection, gratitude, charity. We all acknowledge the reasonableness of these, by the applauses we bestow upon those who possess them, and the high degree of disapprobation, of which we think those worthy who are destitute of them.

The man who betrays his country, who is cruel to his parents, ungrateful to his benefactors, or who hardens his heart against the calls of misery, we account a monster. Such a person, as being deprived of the chief characteristics of his kind, we call inhuman. He may possess the form, but he has shaken off the nature of a man. Thus benevolence being a principle in our constitution, the reasonableness of the precept in the text is evident.

This would be farther established, were we to consider how absolutely and indispensably necessary, in a certain degree at least, it is for the very being and support of human life. For how long a period of life is man in a helpless condition, the most destitute of all animals, if his fellow-creatures did not give him their assistance! Exclude the principle of good-will in all its kinds, and the general lot of human life would be a short struggle with misery extreme; or rather without that principle there could be no such thing as human life: I

am sure, not the least ray of human happiness. Add to this, that to the higher degree this second commandment is observed, man is in proportion so much the happier: and were it observed in perfection, the calamities of life would then be as few, as they are at present numerous. From these considerations, which might have been much enlarged upon, it is evident that the duty prescribed in the text, is truly fit and reasonable, becoming the nature, necessary for the condition, and productive of the happiness of mankind.

But the duty is not only prescribed, but likewise the measure of it pointed out.
Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

It is the excellence of our religion, not only to propose the justest, and the best precepts with respect to our fellow-creatures, but also to afford us some marks, taken from what passes within ourselves, in order to enable us to discern when they are rightly obeyed. Thus our actions are

not only commanded to be honest, kind, and charitable, but also to be so in that degree, which we could reasonably desire those of others to be with regard to ourselves. *Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do ye also so unto them*^a. And in the text, we are not only commanded to wish well to others, and to love them, but also informed that our good-will then arrives at the christian degree of perfection, when it is in proportion to that affection which respects the individual; that is, the principle of benevolence ought to be as vigorous, as the principle of self-love. Desire to promote the good of mankind, equally with our own, is the elevated pitch, to which christianity would exalt its votaries. A perfect disciple of Christ will be as tender about his neighbour's reputation, as he is about his own; as unwilling to spread a slanderous report of another, as he is uneasy to hear one of himself; as anxious to promote his brother's advantage, and as well pleased with the attainment of it, as

^a Matthew vii. 12.

he is joyful when something good happens to himself. When he is reproached, self-love leads him to justify himself; good-will prompts him to justify his neighbour whom he hears aspersed. Involve him in want, he feels pain and uneasiness, but religion and fortitude come in to his aid. If the case is his neighbour's, he not only feels pain and uneasiness on his account, but he employs all his efforts to relieve him. Let the first disciples of Christ bear testimony to this character. They felt no want, but what was common. They knew no pain but what every one was willing to take his share of; no joy but what every heart made its own. They indeed considered themselves as *members of the same body*, and acted in every respect like those who believed the justice of this allusion.

The reasonableness of our Saviour's precept of loving others as we love ourselves may be discerned if we attend to this, that benevolence is the principle by which we regard several individuals of the spe-

cies, self-love that by which we regard one individual. When we consider the two feelings in this respect, they appear directed to objects exactly alike, and therefore ought to be equal.

Before I leave this head, I shall only make two remarks, as to the wisdom of fixing the degree of our self-love as the measure of our good-will to others.—In the first place, as self-love is generally a very strong principle in mankind, the precept, as delivered in our text, may prove a strong incitement to those who confess the obligation of it, to increase their good-will. Secondly, as self-love is very often apt to exceed its just bounds, the consideration of its inferiority to our benevolence may lead us to endeavour, while we aim at increasing the latter, to bring the other to a more allowable pitch.

The nature of the subject has drawn me into some reasoning that may, to some capacities, appear rather too abstracted; tho'

I have endeavoured to express myself as clearly as I could. The sum of what has been said is this: The love of our neighbour is altogether reasonable in itself, being conformable to that constitution which God has given us. Confined to no sect, party, or class of men; it ought to be universal. Besides this general principle of good-will, there are other separate principles, which attach us more strongly to our particular connections; but these are likewise comprehended in the text; and tho' they may increase the force of the former with regard to those particulars, they ought not to weaken it with regard to the whole. By the perfect rule of our religion, a christian cannot rest satisfied with any measure of good-will to others, below what he bears to himself. O religion truly divine, which thus, by striking at the great root of our vices, an intolerable degree of selfishness, and a disregard to others, would at once cure us of them all, and render us like the angels in heaven, who in that happy clime, under the benign influences of the sun of

righteousness, overflow with love and charity ! Let me now, my beloved brethren, persuade you to the practice of the duty, upon which we have been discoursing, by presenting to you some of the most obvious and strongest motives.

In the first place, a generous, open, and benevolent heart, is ever attended with the most genuine pleasure ; for to the exercise of love, gratitude, kindness, providence has annexed a most pure and unmixed joy. The mind of man is desirous to grasp a large object, and pleased with the conception of it ; but are not the human race, our connection with them, a desire of their happiness, truly grand and pleasing conceptions ? Does the man, think you, whose situation puts it out of his power to extend his good deeds to mankind, feel no satisfaction in dilating his soul, to wish well to the whole, in recommending them to the universal parent, in shedding the generous tear, when a tear is all he has to bestow, over the children of affliction ? Ask himself. He

will inform you, that the goods of this world should never be a bribe for him, to steel his heart against the calamities of the unfortunate, or deprive him of the joy of ranging thro' the great circle of God's creation, to wish well to all rational beings. A contracted temper is always fretful, peevish, and disquieted. The sources of its pleasures must necessarily be few and scanty; whereas a benevolent disposition is not only a source of the highest delight in itself, but it leaves a man open to the several gratifications of this life, and to all the innocent enjoyments that man is heir to. This temper both gives a relish to a person's own proper pleasures, and appropriates to him those of his fellow-creatures. He rejoices with those that rejoice; and even when in the house of mourning he weeps with them that weep, there is a secret charm which more than repays the sorrow.

Again, would you wish to act properly so as to obtain the approbation of your fel-

low-creatures, and to appear amiable in their eyes? There is not so effectual a method to procure the esteem and love of mankind, as to wish well to them, and to convince every one with whom you have intercourse, that you have their happiness at heart. Sympathy is the great bond of union among human souls. To raise any affection in the breast of another, the most direct course is to shew a similar one in your own. Thus the man possessed of the most generous and unlimited good-will, who considers his fellow-creatures as so many of his brethren, and is stedfast in all the offices of humanity, kindness and charity, is sure not only to be the object of approbation, but also the object of affection. Who is the sovereign that gains the affection of his people, the general that obtains the good-will of his army, the magistrate that attaches the regard of his citizens, the neighbour whom all that know speak well of? Is it not he, who shews that he deserves to be beloved, by first loving those with whom he is con-

ned? Reflect upon the characters which always have been, and always are considered as the most amiable and engaging, and the circumstances which have made them be thought so; are they not those who have either been lovers of mankind, and of their country, or the friends of the fatherless and of the poor? Hath not history consecrated to immortality those who in heathen times impelled by a false religion, but with a view to save their country, willingly devoted themselves to destruction? Such an effect had this patriotism on those who were witnesses of it, that their veneration carried them beyond all reasonable bounds, in so much that they paid them divine honours. It must be owned that with the greatest justice the memory of those heroes is to this day highly regarded.

When we read that Moses abandoned the pleasures of a court, and of vice, for the sake of his people; when we consider his continual watchings for their happiness, his

prayers for their recovery after they had offended, his mild forbearance with their froward and rebellious temper; do we not behold him in the most engaging view that man can be exhibited in? The splendour of David's crown and the lustre of his royalty are quite eclipsed by the glory of the man, when we see remorse for his sin, and love for his people, prompting these generous sentiments. *I have sinned; but for these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand be against me and against my father's house^b.* How amiable is the character of the most patient man, who in the depth of his distress, was able to make this noble appeal to heaven. *Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor^c? I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy^d.* But above all, how divinely

^b 1 Chron. xxi. 17.

^c Job xxx. 25.

^d Job xxx. 13. 15.

engaging is the character of Christ Jesus, who shewed the most illustrious instance of good-will to men that the world ever saw; for he came to be a ransom for many, and to purchase their redemption, he led a life of unexampled sorrow, and suffered a death overwhelming to all the powers of humanity. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends; but God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.* O Jesus, let all nations bow down before thee, and let all people praise thee, for thy love to mankind is inexpressible!

But finally, brethren, consider, as a motive to engage you to universal good-will, and to all the offices of kindness and charity, that this is the only way truly to shew yourselves the disciples of Christ Jesus. *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*

* John xv. 13. Rom. v. 8.

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This, saith he, is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you; and again, a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another^f. Deceive not yourselves; if the spirit of love dwelleth not in you, ye are strangers to the power of Christ's religion. You may wear the appearance of religion, but if you be addicted to ill-will, hatred, revenge, uncharitableness, tho' you should artfully endeavour to conceal them, in the sight of God you are at best but whited sepulchres, and to you the new testament applies all the woes pronounced against the Pharisees, those hypocrites of old, by the infallible Teacher of mankind. Above all things, then, my brethren, have fervent charity, and remember that this commandment we have from Christ, *that he who loveth God, love his brother also*^g. If you have any resentments, now lay them aside. If you have a contracted spirit, give yourselves no rest till you overcome it; and put on, as the

^f John xiii. 34. 35. ^g 1 John iv. 21.

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elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye; and above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness^h.

^h Col. iii. 12, 13, 14.

M 2

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COLOSSIANS iii. 14.

*And above all these things, put on charity,
which is the bond of perfectness.*

THE same word which in this verse, and in several other parts of the new testament is translated *charity*, is also frequently rendered *love*. Thus *Walk in love^a; follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love^b*. I may further remark to you, that the word is derived from that which our Saviour uses in the following passages, and many others of the same import. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself^c. This is my commandment, that ye love one another^d*. By this expression, *the bond of perfectness*, is meant, that this love or charity is the most perfect bond of human society, that it is that virtue which, if properly exerted, would re-

^a Eph. v. 2. ^b 1 Tim. vi. 11. ^c Matth. xix. 19.

^d John xv. 12.

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tain men in the practice of all those duties which they owe to one another, and prevent those vices which occasion so much disturbance and present misery.

From these words I might properly draw several subjects of discourse; but I purpose only at this time to explain the nature and properties of christian charity.

Charity may be defined that disposition which inclines us to think and speak well of our fellow-creatures, and to deal kindly with them. Mere benevolence, or goodwill, regards the beneficence of our actions, and our disposition to do good. Charity includes this, but respects more immediately the sentiments and affections which we feel towards others. Under the definition now given are comprehended various virtues, to which in the ordinary intercourse of life we give different names. Thus it comprehends candour in our judgments, fairness in our actions, humanity and kindness in our whole behaviour. It

also implies the absence of several of the blackest vices of human nature, malice, envy, falseness, deceit, cruelty, oppression, slander. Charity in this respect may be compared to a liberal fountain, giving rise to a large river, which in its course divides itself into several branches, and disperses health and plenty over the countries thro' which it runs. And as this disposition of mind which we are considering may properly be denominated the parent of many distinct virtues; so it may be remarked, that a small variation in the objects towards which it is exercised occasions its being called by different appellations. Thus, our love to mankind is termed benevolence; our love to our country, patriotism; our love to our friends, friendship; our love to our kindred or families, affection. Neither is it surprizing that from the same simple original quality should proceed such various and extensive effects. We may observe in the natural world, that from the same seed arise many stalks, each containing many ears of the same kind that

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was sown. From a small seed ariseth a tree with a trunk, branches, and leaves, between which and the seed deposited in the ground, the most sharp-sighted can trace no resemblance, and which produceth in its turn many seeds of the same kind. There is a likeness and analogy between these things and the principles of our minds; or perhaps the qualities of the latter admit still of greater and more surprizing variations. The simple, original qualities of our mind are probably not very numerous; but they are, as it were, seeds sown by the hand of the Creator, which gradually expand themselves, grow up, and assume very various and distinct appearances. The simple quality itself requires some abstraction and attention to observe it; like a small seed, scarcely visible to the naked eye, but its effects are obvious to every person.

As charity therefore comprehends so many virtues, and has such extensive influence on the conduct of life, both in impelling to that which is right, and in re-

straining from that which is wrong; it will be much more useful to consider it with respect to its effects and consequences, than to regard it merely in an abstract light. And to render what I have to say as practical as possible, I shall consider the influence of charity upon the mind and behaviour of a christian with respect to the world; with respect to his country; with respect to those with whom he is connected in the same city, neighbourhood, or society; with respect to those who differ from him in religious principles or opinions; with respect to his enemies; and with respect to the vicious and abandoned.

First, Let us consider the effect of charity with respect to the world. The survey of the narrowness of our present power and sphere of action, of the extent of our capacity of thought and perception, gives us the prospect of a contrast that is very wonderful. Our power of bestowing happiness upon others, or procuring it to ourselves is very limited; but our thought can

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range from one region to another, and travel with the lightning of heaven. Before we can move those clogs of mortality which we wear, from one street to another, our imaginations are able to encompass the globe, or to visit the stars. We find that the desires and affections of our nature are not suited to our powers of action, but to our capacity of thought and imagination; and the man who entertained no wishes, inclinations, or propensions, but such as his present power could gratify or accomplish, would be scarce superior to a reptile, notwithstanding his form. When we compare our connections and acquaintance, those with whom we interchange mutual good offices, with the general body of mankind, they are limited within very narrow bounds, and confined to a very small number: but there is a strong law, the law of humanity, which connects us with all who are endowed with the same common nature. No impassable mountains, no innavigable oceans, no inhospitable deserts, are boundaries to intercept

the force and authority of this law. Like the sun, it extends its heat and its influence to the utmost corner of the earth, and proves a connecting principle with all our fellow-creatures.

Suitable to this general and extensive law of humanity, christian charity requires that we wish well unto all, and offer supplications to God upon their account. *I exhort, therefore, says the apostle to Timothy, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men^e.*

By our neighbour, according to our Saviour's religion, is not to be understood, one who lives in the same country, who is governed by the same laws, or subject to the same polity; but every one who is endowed with the same nature. To every such person, whether Christian, Jew, Pagan, or Mahometan, we are to abound in love, and to do good whenever we have opportunity. A

^e 1 Tim. ii. 1.

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good christian, when he thinks of the miseries, blindness, errors, and vices which prevail in the world, will surely out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, pray to the Father of mercy to remove them, and in the fervour of his spirit, and the sincerity of his love, wish *that all the kingdoms of the earth may become the kingdoms of our God, and of his son Jesus Christ.*

2dly, Let us consider the influence of charity upon the temper and conduct of a christian with respect to his country. As the Almighty has divided men into kingdoms and nations upon the face of the earth, it is a part of the constitution of providence that we receive particular benefits from certain laws, governments, and tracts of country. This gives us a particular connection with certain communities, and in a well-disposed mind confers upon the principle of charity, the modification of love of our country. Now charity in this respect obligeth us to pray for the prosperity of our country, and to contribute to it as far as in our power,

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It requires us to pay a deference to the laws, and to respect and obey our lawful governors, to contemn honours, power, or interest, when they cannot be obtained in a consistence with the laws; and to sacrifice private and partial views to the happiness of the state. These are general obligations upon every man: neither are they to be reckoned hard or severe; for in experience, I believe it will be found, that the love of our country, reverence and obedience to its laws, prove the surest path to the true happiness of individuals. And surely the consideration of the free and happy constitution under which we live, of the general justice and equity of our laws, of the security that is commonly possessed not only for our lives, but for our interests and property, ought to strengthen and increase in every Briton this sentiment of love to his country.

That what has been now advanced is entirely agreeable to the spirit and tenor of the scripture, is manifest. With what warmth does every Jew speak of the city of

Jerusalem, and of that people who were separated by the Lord from all the nations of the earth ! How affectionately does our Saviour speak of the same people, and what earnestness and anxiety does he discover for their welfare ! But still farther, tho' at the time of his coming they were retained in subjection to a foreign power, so far from encouraging any rebellious sentiments against their conquerors, or using any means, as they imagined that he would, to deliver them from their oppression, he teaches that it was their duty, *to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*^f, and refuses not himself the jurisdiction of a court, where a governor of his appointment presided. The doctrine that is delivered in the 13th chapter of the epistle to the Romans is entirely conformable to these sentiments. *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,* (says the Apostle) *for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God: Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. Wherefore*

^f Mark xii. 14.

ye must not only be subject for wrath, but for conscience sake. What has been before said relates to the duty of men in general with respect to their country. I may add, that the principle of love of our country lays particular obligations upon men in particular circumstances. Thus it is the duty of the statesman to consult and deliberate for the good of his country, of all officers of justice to administer equity impartially, of the soldier and sailor to encounter the enemies of the state with bravery, and of all who have any public trust to execute it with integrity.

3dly, Let us consider the influence of the law of charity with respect to those who live in the same city, neighbourhood, or society. There are many whose views are so narrow, and whose knowledge is so confined, that they scarcely form to themselves conceptions of the general body of mankind, or even of that large community of which they are members. We feel our-

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selves more ready to pity the ignorance,
 than to condemn the vice of such men.
 But there are none who have the natural
 use of reason, who are not sensible of their
 connection with their fellow-citizens, or
 neighbours, or with that particular society
 or order of men to which they belong. And
 here, if all the effects of love and charity
 were to be withheld, the foundations of
 society would be overturned. Our state
 would be much worse than that of those
 miserable savages who live in the woods,
 support themselves upon the fruits which
 nature spontaneously produces, and fear a
 foe in every man they meet. From the
 constitution of providence the boast of
 absolute independence, or even of inde-
 pendence upon our fellow-creatures is al-
 together vain and chimerical. In social life
 how could the rich be cloathed or fed, or
 have their houses furnished, or their nume-
 rous wants supplied, if it were not for the
 poor, the laborious, and the industrious?
 What is the title of a sovereign if he has no
 subjects, but an empty name? What ar-

duous deed could a general perform, if he were deserted by all his troops?

In human life we are linked together by a chain formed by the hand of Omnipotence, and to this connection both duty and necessity should engage us to submit. With regard therefore to those of our fellow-creatures with whom we have immediate intercourse, the law of charity obligeth us to act with all fairness, honesty, sincerity and kindness. It obligeth the rich to refuse the gains of oppression, to be mild, merciful, ready to relieve the wants of the indigent, and compassionate the wretched brethren of their nature. It obligeth those in an inferior station to be just and faithful in their service, submissive in their behaviour, and grateful for the good offices they receive. It obligeth all men to be candid in their interpretation of one anothers actions and intentions, to bear with one anothers frailties, and to forgive each others faults. Such behaviour every person expects, and thinks reasonable with regard to

himself; and no rule can be more equitable, than to do to others as we would that others should do to us.

But in society the characters of men, and the relations on which we stand to them are so different, that the application of the law of charity is almost infinitely varied. To explain more fully the nature of this virtue, let us consider,

4thly, The effects it will produce with respect to those who differ from us in religious principles and opinions. Upon this subject there are two opposite sentiments; both of which seem to me to be erroneous.

First; some think, that error in religious principle is so fatal and damnable, that they can have no good thoughts of those men who entertain it, and cannot believe that any who are so unacceptable in the sight of God can be entitled to any particular offices of kindness or charity, and if

they would speak out, scarcely to the common duties of humanity. Such sentiments shock all our feelings. Our Saviour disapproves of them in the strongest manner, when he rebukes the forward zeal of his followers who desired to destroy those that refused to admit him into their city, by calling for fire from heaven. Surely men who think in this way, know not what spirit they are of.

On the other hand, many seem to think, that there is no necessity nor propriety in giving one's self concern about religious opinions, provided the practice be upright and honest. But certainly truth deserves our search. Just opinions influence our conduct in many degrees. In many instances, even in ways that we cannot now conceive, they may promote our future happiness, or under the government of God, the want of them may occasion much future wretchedness and distress. To maintain pure, therefore, the faith that we

2 Luke ix. 54, 55.

believe to have been delivered to the saints, is our duty; and zeal in the propagation of it becomes a christian. But what is that zeal? Is it the zeal of a furious party-man, of an enthusiast, or a persecutor? No; these characters are detestable. Is it not then the zeal of a reasonable enquirer, of an honest and a good man, who truly believes, and firmly maintains his opinions, who at the same time that he endeavours to rectify the errors of his fellow-creatures, yet pities those who are misled by these errors, because he knows himself to be exposed to error? Is it a zeal about modes, ceremonies, and the externals of religion? Or is it about matters of which the importance is obvious? Surely the latter. A man may properly think that nothing relating to religion is of so little consequence as not to engage his attention; but the weightier matters of the law will employ his thoughts much more than the less weighty.

Christian charity will then engage the man who is actuated by it to differ with

temper, to reason with moderation, to try to convince by the weight of his arguments, not by the violence of his passions. He knoweth *that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God^h. The servant of the Lord will not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them that oppose themselvesⁱ. As he will try to convince, so he will be ever open to hear, and to weigh the reasons of his adversaries. Sensible of the weakness of human nature, and in how different lights the same thing appears to different men, yea even to the same man at different times, he will still maintain his differences in the bond of peace. He will not assume the strange work of the Lord, or denounce the judgments of heaven, but rather hope that in some future period, both he himself and those that oppose him may be brought to see more clearly, and have all their errors dispelled. Let Mahometans employ the sword to bring men to the obedience of their prophet, and to reduce them to uni-*

^h James i. 20. ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

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formity in religion; but O that christians never had forgot that the voice which ushered in their Master into the world proclaimed peace on earth and good-will to men, and that the weapons by which he establishes his kingdom are not carnal, but spiritual!

5thly, Let us consider in what manner christian charity should engage us to behave to our enemies.

There is no principle in human nature more apt to exert itself than resentment, when we meet with any treatment that we judge improper, undeserved, or severe. The first feeling is natural, unavoidable, and necessary in the present situation of mankind; but the due moderation and restraint of it commonly exposes us to one of the hardest trials that we meet with in life. Herein then consists the victory and triumph of the christian, that the greatest and most unprovoked injuries he always abstains from revenging. His honesty and

his candour are too great not to let his enemy know, that he is sensible of the ill-treatment he has met with, but his charity and self-government are so great, that he suffers no injurious expression to pass his lips; and were his foe in his power, his first attempt would be to reclaim him by meekness, gentleness, and true greatness of mind; and upon his repentance, he would cordially be reconciled to him, and receive him as his brother. If that were rendered impracticable, the utmost length he would go would be to deprive him of the power of repeating the like injustice; or if his crime deserved the interposition of the magistrate, he might deliver him to the just punishment of the laws; but every impartial spectator might observe the uneasiness he felt at being compelled to such severity.

Do you think this pitch of virtue surpasses human nature? We sometimes, though rarely, see that pride produceth this forgiveness, as thinking the person

who has offended below consideration : and shall the noblest virtue of the human heart be thought less powerful upon all occasions than a bad quality is sometimes ? I am sure no duty can be more plainly required, or more strongly insisted upon, than this great duty is in the gospel. *If thy brother, says our Saviour, trespass against thee, rebuke him ; and if he repent, forgive him ; and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him*^k. Upon every interpretation that these words will admit, they show that the christian must carry this temper of forgiveness to the highest pitch. Again, says our Saviour, *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you*^l. The same virtue is strongly recommended in that parable which is contained in the 18th chapter of Matthew, where the

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^k Luke xvii. 3.^l Matth. v. 44.

king is represented as taking an account of his servants, and punishing that one severely who shewed no mercy to his fellow. It concludes with these remarkable words, *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

Lastly, Let us consider the influence of christian charity on our behaviour with respect to the vicious and abandoned. A hatred of vice is natural to an upright mind, and the feeling this is one of the strongest symptoms of a good disposition, and one of the surest guards of virtue. That we should incline to associate with the just, and feel a stronger attachment to them, and that on the contrary we should abstain from the company of the vicious, is surely lawful, prudent, and commendable. But there are many occasions in life, where unless, as the apostle speaketh, *we were to go out of the world,* we cannot avoid meeting

with the impious, the unjust, and the intemperate. It would perhaps be neither good for them, nor for ourselves, that we resolved never to meet with them. The worst are still connected with us while in this world, by the great tie of humanity; and when we consider the misery of vice, and the future punishment that awaits it, a charitable mind is apter to commiserate than to detest.

In these instances, charity therefore obligeth us to take all proper opportunities of instructing, of admonishing, of reproofing, of shewing our disapprobation of the crime, and yet our love of the criminal. Of all the weapons ever yet devised, to bend the wills, alter the temper, and subdue the hearts of men, severity, sourness, bitterness, anger, are the least agreeable to a good mind, and the least successful in themselves. Whereas meekness, gentleness, and yet firmness, the awe and authority of virtue, without the forbidding

air of stubbornness, the soft and amiable charms of true goodness, the generosity of sympathy, the mild, yet penetrating words prompted by these dispositions, prove the most powerful means, and have the strongest influence in gaining sinners, in restraining them from vice, and in winning over willing subjects to the interests of true religion.

S E R M O N IX.

P S A L M li. 17.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

IT is extremely probable that this psalm, in which the sentiments of a true penitent are so strongly expressed, was composed by David, after a sense of his guilt had been raised by the affecting parable of Nathan, which we read in the xiith chapter of the second book of Samuel, and of which the occasion and the consequences are so well known. This whole composition discovers a mind overwhelmed with sorrow, agitated with remorse, earnest for mercy, and penetrated with all that variety of emotions, which the reflection upon flagrant crimes, when it is neither blunted by obduracy nor irritated by despair, so naturally inspires.

In compositions of this kind, we are not to expect a strict connection of thought. Such a connection would totally destroy their beauty, and be a sure proof that the passion of grief, and the feelings of penitence which they exhibit, were assumed, not real. Their true merit consists in the correspondence of the sentiments and expressions, to that animated and varied tenour of soul, from which they are supposed to flow. Considered in this light, the psalm before us abounds with beauties that must strike every sensible reader. In the 14th and 15th verses, David implores, in the most fervent manner, deliverance from the guilt of that blood, which he had so causelessly and basely shed, the recollection of which crime rendered him unable to address the God of purity with confidence and freedom till he had received some assurance of his pardon. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy*

praise. The reflection upon his guilt naturally brings to his mind those sacrifices which were commonly thought to be of an expiatory nature, but which, as we may learn from various places of the psalms, David well knew to be of no value on their own account, and to be only so far acceptable to God, as they were accompanied with suitable dispositions in the offerer. *For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering*^a. But he knew well that the sentiments of penitence, and the meltings of heart occasioned by them, had an intrinsic worth, and a natural propriety. The sacrifice never failed to be acceptable, when attended with such a temper; and without any external sacrifice, this temper was always a pleasing and efficacious offering. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* The metaphorical expression of a *broken spirit* is readily under-

^a Ver. 16.

flood, and the repetition of the sentiment, which in the latter part of the verse is thrown into the form of an address to God, not only leaves a stronger impression, but is extremely natural, as it marks that hope and comfort, which are intermingled with the grief of a penitent, when he reflects upon the mercy and placability of God.

It were needless to consume more time in explaining the proposition contained in the text, which is of itself so intelligible, namely, that a penitent disposition, or unfeigned sorrow for past offences is acceptable to the Almighty. But I think it may be both an agreeable and useful employment, to trace, if possible, some of those causes, on account of which repentance is reckoned in scripture so important a virtue, and declared to be so pleasing to God. This enquiry, if it is properly prosecuted, will discover to us the reasonableness, and the necessity of a penitent disposition, and furnish an opportunity of obviating those ob-

jections, which either from levity, or mistake, may be thrown out upon this subject.

I would only premise, that when we trace the reasons on account of which repentance, or in the language of the text, *a broken and a contrite heart*, is so acceptable to God, it is not necessary to suppose that man is so constituted, as to be capable of discerning the whole, or even the principal of them. There may be relations and fitnesses of the most important nature, and those immediately regarding human characters, to which most men, perhaps the wisest, are entire strangers. And though an ignorance of the ends that are promoted, and of the manner in which they are promoted by a certain temper and behaviour, no doubt forms some presumption against the connection between the means and the end, yet this presumption may be overcome in many different ways. But still it is to be remembered, that our Maker is pleased in most cases, not only to point out our duty to us, but also to lay open

the reasons or grounds of its different branches; and when we plainly discern any part of our conduct, or any disposition of our mind, to be adapted to the general constitution of man, or productive of good effects, we are naturally led to conclude, that this fitness and tendency, though as far as we see them, they may not be the sole or principal causes of the divine approbation, do yet in some measure determine the Deity to bestow his approbation. Let us therefore proceed to consider, with all humility and attention, what those circumstances are, in a penitent disposition, upon which its amiableness and usefulness depend, and which render it acceptable to God.

In the first place: I would observe, that when a person has violated the laws of heaven, and acted contrary to the dictates of his own conscience, it is a part of his constitution, that the reflection upon his guilt should fill him with remorse.

It is a part of the duty of conscience, to condemn our evil actions after they are committed, as well as to warn us against them before-hand, and excite us to avoid them. In giving way therefore to the natural feelings of the mind, when they are prompted by reason, and have the sanction of conscience, there is, independent of the utility of such a conduct, something so amiable in the eye of man, that we cannot but suppose it at the same time acceptable in the sight of God.

In many instances, the restraining and moderating of the natural feelings of the mind, is one considerable part of our duty; but the suppressing, or counteracting of them altogether, though this has sometimes been the boasted aim of philosophy, is plainly reversing the work of God, and distinctly opposing that intention which is discovered to us in the construction of our inward frame. Were there nothing more in contrition and sorrow of heart for past sins, but merely giving scope to that

self-reproach, which conscience excites on their account, we must necessarily approve the exercise of it. In like manner, we cannot but condemn the person who, though he has given the justest occasion for such sentiments of remorse, is altogether a stranger to them.

If it be objected, that what is past cannot be recalled, that an action already committed cannot be altered, or cancelled by the tears that are now shed for it: I answer, Because I cannot recal what is past, because my future conduct cannot cancel or obliterate my former sins, therefore disquiet and compunction take hold of my mind; and by indulging this compunction to a certain degree, I am sensible that I act in conformity to the best principles of my nature, and I approve of such conduct, as I do in many other cases, without reflecting upon the advantage with which it may be attended. When one hears the last groan of an only child, or lends a hand to close his eyes, the tear naturally falls, and

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grief takes possession of the soul. We approve of that tear, and sympathize with this grief: but will a river of tears recal to its ancient receptacle the departed spirit, or, as far as we know, procure the least benefit to that object of our affection for whom they are shed? Yet the man whose eyes are dry from considerations of this kind, we condemn as an unsusceptible and selfish being, who refuses to endure a pain which his nature prompts him to suffer, because it cannot contribute to the completion of his desires.

Thus the consideration that sorrow for our past offences is natural to the human mind, or, in other words, conformable to that constitution which God has given us, affords us just reason to conceive that they will meet with his approbation and acceptance. I have said that it affords us just reason to conceive, because I am sensible, that what has now been said, would prove too weak a foundation for supporting the assurance of his acceptance, if we had no-

thing to aid us in our research but the light of nature. But every one will observe that to investigate the reasonableness of a doctrine that is revealed, is quite a different thing from establishing the certainty of the same doctrine, if no revelation had been granted to us.

I have not in this discourse used any arguments to prove that remorse is natural to a guilty mind: Every man is sensible that it is. We are surprized when we meet with any person, who is not filled with horror by the consciousness of an atrocious crime which he has perpetrated. Malefactors when they allow themselves to think, seldom fail to experience this horror, which is the first step to true penitence.

But the suitableness of a penitent disposition to the nature of man, is not the sole reason for supposing it acceptable to God. I proceed therefore to observe in the second place, that this contrition seems to be absolutely necessary, in order to produce a

change of temper, and a reformation of conduct.

If this shall appear to be the case, it will be one of the many instances which evince, that what is conformable to our natures, promotes at the same time the most important ends. Now if a person commits a crime, for which he feels no compunction, place him in the like circumstances, and what reason is there to think that he will abstain from repeating it? He was surely seduced at first by the violence of some passion, the force of some appetite, or the desire of some end that perhaps had been allowable if it had been attained by lawful means. If the same passion assails him, if the same appetite urges him, or the same desirable end is to be attained by the like unlawful means, for what reason will he abstain from an action, the commission of which never gave him an hour's uneasiness? Cain slew his brother Abel in the field; and from the history it does not appear that at first he was touched with re-

remorse. Was any thing more wanting but another brother, and the like envy and resentment, to induce him to repeat the crime? It is true, that though some considerable time elapsed, between David's first guilty step, and the message which God sent him by Nathan, he had only seduced one Bathsheba, and murdered one Uriah; but if like beauties had in that interval kindled like unlawful desires, and if other Uriahs had obstructed their gratification, what reason is there to think, that the sacredness of wedlock, or the respect for a brave and guiltless servant, would have restrained him? Attend to the matter as it is considered in common life. If a person commits an unjust action, for which he feels no shame or remorse, suppose a theft; will any person of common sense who knows this, trust to his honesty in the like situation?

But where the feelings of penitence take possession of the mind, they naturally and unavoidably alter the disposition, and have

a direct influence in reforming the conduct. The stings of conscience, the meltings of sorrow, the prayers for pardon, the solemn renunciations of sin and the resolutions of amendment, all which are included in penitence, prove so many powerful arguments, to resist the violence of those passions which have produced so much pain. They will probably abate the strength and impetuosity of unlawful desires: they will certainly prove natural curbs and restraints to prevent us from indulging these. They are evidently strong incentives to prefer for the future the peaceful and sedate enjoyments of virtue, and to abandon for ever the tumultuous, but disquieting pleasures of vice. After David had so often *watered his couch with his tears*¹, after he had in such bitterness of spirit composed his penitential psalms; how strongly must his soul have been fortified against the indulgence of a criminal passion? How determined must he naturally have been against incur-

¹ Psalm vi. 6.

ring the guilt of innocent blood, which had already occasioned in his soul such exquisite torments? Can it be reckoned unfair to conclude, that the remorse which agitated the mind of Peter, when he *wept bitterly*^m upon denying his Master, and the resolutions with which his penitence for a conduct so dastardly and mean inspired him, contributed greatly to render him so intrepid during the remainder of his life, so daring in the time of danger, and so unshaken in the midst of the most unjust and violent persecutions? In common life we always suppose (which is a strong proof of the natural tendency of repentance) that a person who has been guilty of a bad action, and suffered the compunctions of penitence, will avoid a repetition of that which caused them; and, in order to have a reasonable security for his good behaviour, and to dispose us to trust him, the chief difficulty lies in determining whether his penitence was feigned, or real. You

^m Matth. xxvi. 75.

will readily see, that by penitence, we here mean not those violent fallies of grief, which are to be discovered in some of the most fluctuating and variable characters, but that anguish of heart, that humiliation before God, those resolutions, and those efforts, which repentance is commonly understood to imply.

With regard to the curbs, or restraints which real penitence for particular crimes naturally lays upon the mind, it is further to be observed that, though they principally relate to those crimes, which occasioned the penitence, they are not confined to them. It is natural, almost unavoidable, that they should be extended to vice in general, and particularly to all vices that are of a more atrocious nature. A man who has deeply repented of an expression injurious to his neighbour, will not only have strong motives to guard against calumny in his conversation, but doubtless will be equally cautious of giving a false testimony against his neighbour in a court of justice. The

thought is so obvious, it cannot fail to occur. If an injurious expression dropt in common discourse subjected me to such remorse, what will be the consequence, what must I feel, if in a public trial I give a solemn testimony that shall be equally false? This observation might be illustrated by a thousand other instances, but I think it is sufficiently intelligible from what I have said.

Thirdly, In order to shew the importance of a penitent disposition, and the reason of its being so acceptable to God, I would remark, that it puts the soul in a proper frame for receiving the impressions of virtue in general. I only observed before, that it had a natural tendency to restrain us from vice, and to engage us to form resolutions against it. This leads a step farther. The mind of man has been compared to a soil, which requires preparation and culture before the seed can be thrown into it with advantage. In the same manner there are certain dispositions of mind which are friendly to the

lessons of virtue, and to the precepts of religion. When the soul is softened with repentance, then is the hour to inculcate the maxims of purity and holiness, and to animate to a virtuous conduct. I do not say that it is the only season; but surely it will be allowed that it affords one proper opportunity for this purpose. If you had a pupil whom you were anxious to train up to virtue, when could you hope more effectually to inspire him with the love of mercy, gentleness, and equity, than when he repented of some rash, injurious, or severe action? If we were to inculcate a prudent and discreet behaviour upon any neighbour or friend, to whom we wished well, when could we choose a fairer occasion, than when he felt, and lamented the ill consequences of a foolish step? In a word, when would we judge a person to have a proper degree of tractableness and sensibility, an aptness to imbibe instruction, and a disposition to retain it, if not when his heart is softened, his conscience alarmed, his abhorrence of guilt strong, and his purposes

and aims already pointed to piety, and virtue?

It was probably this natural tendency of a contrite spirit which induced our Saviour to make it an indispensable requisite in those who came to him. He called not the righteous, that is, those who had a high opinion of their own merit, but sinners, or those who were deeply penetrated with a sense of their own guilt. To the same purpose he declares that he is the physician not to the whole, but to the sick. Publicans and sinners resorted to him, and if they had obeyed the instruction of his forerunner who admonished them to repent, they never were rejected. Many of the parables which our Saviour delivered, represent the same truth in the strongest manner. Penitence may therefore be considered as the ground-work of virtue, or the culture that prepares the soul for its reception.

In the fourth place, I observe, that as it has this tendency in general, so it is parti-

cularly calculated for the improvement and exercise of some of the most capital virtues of the christian life. If we consider any one virtuous disposition, as prevailing in the mind, it has probably a remote tendency to form a complete character of virtue and holiness, and lays a foundation for those virtues that least resemble itself. It has some kind of attractive quality with respect to every thing that bears the same general character : but the attractive quality becomes much more vigorous and discernible, with respect to those virtues, that are of the most similar and congenial nature. In that case the mind passes with the greatest facility and readiness from the former to the latter, and the force of the prevailing principle naturally spreads, and communicates itself. The application of this doctrine to the subject in hand will illustrate what has been said.

A penitent disposition has, as we have seen, a natural influence in preparing the mind for the entertainment and practice

of virtue in general, but it has a more powerful and immediate influence, in cultivating some particular virtues of great importance. For instance, when a person repents of any act of injustice or fraud, he will be led to form direct resolutions of living honestly and uprightly. His penitence therefore will give a direct impulse to the mind to practise justice. This again may lead his attention to the other virtues, and give his mind an impulse to temperance and forgiveness, though the tendency in this case be only remote. But it is to be observed, that the penitent disposition we describe, from whatever occasion it has taken its rise, naturally inclines the heart to piety, meekness, moderation and charity. It will be acknowledged that these are virtues of the first class; and if it be absolutely necessary, as we are sure it is, that our minds be tinctured with these, in order to our acceptance with God, whatever contributes so largely to their improvement, must certainly be of the highest importance. The attentive hearer will perceive,

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that I do not consider penitence, as the only instrument of our improvement in virtue, but as one among others, which by the appointment of providence, and the constitution of our nature, is rendered subservient to this end. And that this is the case, I imagine, can scarcely be disputed.

Repentance leads us to consider the supreme Being as highly displeased with sin, yet inclinable to mercy. And certainly no considerations can operate more powerfully to draw forth our reverence and our love, two of the principal parts of piety. Every one knows, that the softness and the sorrow of heart which repentance excites are nearly allied to humanity. As a proof of this, I need only remark, that the breathings of a contrite spirit are commonly intermixed with humane and generous sentiments. If a penitent were uttering a peevish, a discontented, a despairing expression, though it would be justly condemned as indecent and wrong, we should not yet question the sincerity of his repentance. But if we dis-

covered a sentiment of cruelty, or inhumanity, we should not hesitate a moment in pronouncing it hypocritical. With respect to meekness, moderation, and charity, I shall only add, that nothing can tend more strongly to improve them, than the recollection of our own frailties and failings, for which we ourselves stand in need of so many allowances. If any of us proposed to persuade another to be candid and charitable, what more direct course could we take, than to remind him of those instances, wherein he had reason to wish for the candour and charity of others? But penitence brings to remembrance things of this kind, with more force and energy than can be effected by the most accomplished orator. It is the very disposition which arises from the deepest impression of them.

Thus we have seen, that penitence, or *a broken and a contrite heart*, is adapted to the nature and constitution which God has given us; that it is the proper and powerful corrective of those vices which

occasioned it : that it prepares the heart for the reception and culture of virtue in general ; and that it has an immediate influence in exciting and increasing our piety, humanity, meekness, moderation and charity. But surely what is so suitable to the best and noblest principles of the mind, and productive of such eminent and peculiar advantages for the improvement of the character, must be highly pleasing to God. *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

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S E R M O N X.

MATTHEW vii. 24—28.

Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

THE frequent declarations of the gospel and the experience of human life sufficiently convince us of a fact, which upon a bare consideration of the matter, we should scarcely suppose could take place,

That the knowledge and the practice of religion are not only often disjoined, but that men are very apt to consider the former as most essential and so efficacious as to insure the favour of God, though the latter should be totally, or in a great measure disregarded. When I attend to the feelings of my own heart, I am astonished that this depravity should be found in the list of human errors. When I read the gospel, I am still more astonished that it should prevail among christians, and that perhaps in as great a degree as it does among Pagans or Mahometans. The voice of nature commands us in the first place to act the part which becomes a man. The dictates of religion constantly teach us, *that if we know our duty, happy are we if we do it.* The verses which I have now read to you plainly inculcate this truth. It is the conclusion drawn from the general tenor of our Saviour's sermon on the mount, and in a particular manner from the passages which immediately precede. At the 15th verse he cautions his disciples to beware of

false and deceitful appearances, and by an illustration taken from the trees and herbs of the field, he teaches this important doctrine, That human conduct and behaviour are the great characteristics of sentiments and dispositions. *Wherefore*, says he in the 20th verse, *by their fruits ye shall know them*. Then in a new paragraph, from the 21st to the 24th verse, he continues the same subject in that simple yet energetic manner which we naturally expect must have operated strongly, as we learn from the concluding verses of this chapter that it actually did, on the opinions and affections of his hearers. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven*. In the estimation of our Saviour, the power of foretelling future events, the power of ejecting demons, the power of working miracles, which it seems were conferred sometimes in those days like strength, beauty, or external advantages, and possessed by men who abused them, were inferior to that

piety and virtue which, though much neglected, are without doubt the noblest accomplishments of man. Our Saviour then sums up his reasoning upon this subject in the verses I have now read to you. In these the indissoluble connection which ought to subsist betwixt the knowledge and the practice of religion is plainly declared, and the wisdom of our maintaining this connection represented by a similitude taken from the prudence or imprudence of different characters in common life. An attention to the events which occur, and to those truths which may be learned from experience, constitutes the difference betwixt a wise man and a fool; and nothing leaves so strong an impression upon our minds of this difference, as a representation of both engaged in the same plans and operations, and of the various success which accompanies them, arising from the observance or neglect of some material circumstances. *Whosoever therefore heareth these sayings of mine, &c.*

In discoursing therefore from my text, it shall be my business at this time to lay before you some arguments which may shew both the wisdom and necessity of joining the practice of religion to the knowledge of it.

By living in a country where the gospel is published, by having the scriptures in our hands, by the frequent opportunities we enjoy of hearing the truths of religion explained to us, by the general sense that there is of moral obligation, and by the force of christianity in preserving and improving this sense, I think it may be asserted, that the knowledge of religion still prevails in a considerable degree among us. It is indeed difficult to conceive that accounts so simple and so interesting, truths so pleasing and so alarming, and revelations so well adapted to the various capacities of human nature as those contained in the gospel, should be read or heard with attention by those who believe the veracity of the author or relater, without leaving the

principles of instruction and knowledge. Much have the learned men of this world to answer for, who, by glosses, interpretations, commentaries, and systems, have rendered obscure and intricate what the voice of heaven hath pronounced so plainly. But though the knowledge of religion is, or at least might be in our circumstances very general, I appeal to our lives, the test established by Christ himself, if this knowledge be not much disjoined from practice. We hear the sayings of Christ; but are we careful to do them? Let the intemperance of the young, the avarice of the aged, the oppression of the powerful, and the dishonesty of the indigent, serve for a reply to these questions. I am willing to judge as favourably of the world as possible; I wish rather to extenuate than to exaggerate the vices of my fellow-creatures: and while I see every man professing christianity, and so few even seeming to be anxious to live up to its rules, I am disposed to impute many of their sins to an error in judgment, that the profession and know-

ledge of christianity are important advantages in their favour, and that they will cover a multitude of transgressions. *We are Abraham's seed*, said the Jews upon every occasion, when they wanted to assert their relation to God, or distinction among men; and I cannot help thinking we too often resemble them. We are the disciples of Christ, the professors of the pure, reformed religion, abhorers of the abominations of popery, of the errors of heretics, and so forth. Such pleas, being used by themselves, and unconnected with their natural consequences, give reason to believe that we place more weight in them than we are warranted to do, either from the gospel, or from common sense. I consider our confidence in them as a great foundation of our iniquities, and if I could but as certainly destroy the superstructure as I can shew the weakness of the foundation, I should certainly deserve well of mankind, and enjoy the sweetest of all rewards, the consciousness of having done a worthy action. With this view I proceed to shew

the inseparable connection which should subsist between the knowledge and the practice of religion, or, in the words I used upon first proposing this head of discourse, to shew the necessity of joining the practice of religion to the knowledge of it.

In the first place; The necessity of this union will appear from the consideration that man is a being naturally formed and principally designed for action. Religion then, which is certainly intended for the support, consolation, and direction of man here, and for his preparation for another state, wherein, in all probability, he is destined to be an active being, must be connected with the active powers of his nature, and designed for their culture. That man is a being designed for action, is plain from various indications of his nature. The manner in which our daily food is procured to us, the necessity of labour and exercise for the preservation of health, the helplessness of children, which requires the active exertions of the full grown, and that second

childhood to which the decrepitude of age brings us, and which renders us dependent upon the care, and attention, and active endeavours of those, to whom we had been formerly obliged to lend a like attention in different circumstances; these all shew us that man is made for action, and that necessity forces it upon him. This is so true, that if perfect and entire indolence were to take place, death would soon overtake the vigorous and the robust; and the infant, whose cries seldom fail to excite our attention and our endeavours to help it, and the aged, whose gray hairs and exhausted vigour now command our respect and assistance, would feel the effects of an inhumanity, founded in the love of repose, more fatal than any that ever actuated the breast of the cruel and revengful. Our state and condition then proves that we were intended for action and exertion. The general propensities and conduct of human creatures prove the same. A child no sooner begins to distinguish objects, than it shews some desire of moving towards them or dis-

covers a wish of having them brought within his reach. Ten thousand attempts he makes before he can use his limbs; but no sooner does he obtain the use of them than he is constantly exerting them. Except the season taken up in sleep, children are continually exerting themselves; and all that playfulness and useless labour, as we sometimes think it, but which was once so delightful to every one of us, are necessary to the increase of their growth, the strength of their bodies, the expansion of every corporeal and mental power. Before the age of reason and reflection, an inactive human creature is in that unfortunate condition which we must lament and pity, the condition of idiotism. Can any thing prove more strongly that action is natural to man?

When man grows up, the keenness, the warmth, and the variety of his passions and affections keep him almost constantly employed; and if by the proper direction of these, he does not acquire habits of activity which remain with him at a less turbulent

period of life ; he feels the resentment of nature against his misconduct ; and his listless days, and the discontent which never fails to be consequent upon them, sufficiently inform him how grievously he has erred. To judge of this matter, let us only appeal to what we have experienced. When employed in any innocent and useful occupation, or in the bringing to maturity any virtuous and praise-worthy plan, how short does the day seem, and how swiftly do the hours pass away ! When the body is not employed, nor the mind exerted, when a man is half asleep, and reduced to that often desired state of having nothing to do, how completely miserable is he ! The present hour is tiresome, the reflection upon it is painful. Thus our earliest propensities, and consciousness of what we feel, and experience afterwards, coincide with the necessities of our state and the circumstances of our condition, to show us that man was made for action. Is it to be believed then that religion should be addressed only to what is secondary in

our nature and state, and not to what is primary and most important?

In the 2d place; The necessity of joining the practice of religion to the knowledge of it, appears from the general analogy of nature with respect to all our pursuits, employments, and occupations. Arguments drawn from the general tenor of ordinary life, and applied to things that are of a more spiritual and exalted nature, certainly ought to have weight with us. They will have weight with all who are of a sober and attentive turn of mind, nor, as far as I can recollect, do I know of one general conclusion taken from the ordinary conduct of life, which when applied to us as religious and immortal creatures, would tend to mislead us. Let us then consider how the case stands as to our temporal pursuits and employments; and here we shall find, that if knowledge is considered as sufficient of itself, and not as the foundation for conduct and practice, it becomes even ridiculous, and renders the person indued with

it, more contemptible than if he had been immersed in ignorance. Suppose that any of you called a physician to visit a parent, a child, or a domestick, and that he should talk to you every time of the nature and kind of the distemper with which his patient was afflicted, but apply'd nothing for his relief. What judgment would ye form of him, if the person distressed should die? You would no doubt think you had reason to reproach the physician. And if in answer to your resentment against his indolence and neglect, he should begin a learned dissertation, and prove to you that he understood the case thoroughly; would you not consider him as affronting your understanding, and disgracing his own profession? If you had lost your cause at law by the negligence of your advocate, who, to apologize for himself, should talk to you about the nature of similar rights, of evidence and probation; would you not believe the man to be a compound of knavery and impudence, without the least

spark of virtue, or the least fitness for his employment?

A man that could believe himself to be a husbandman, because he could describe all the utensils in husbandry, and discourse learnedly on the nature of soils and manures, and every time his crop misgave him, should think he sufficiently vindicated his own management by giving an ingenious description of a plough or a harrow, we should all be tempted to esteem a fool, notwithstanding the wisdom of his words.

If a merchant should discourse of all the articles of commerce, describe the countries whence they come, the easiest and best method of importing them, and yet never have any thing in his shop, but goods that were extravagant in their price, and bad in their quality, he might impose upon a silly man in a coffee-house, but no discreet master or mistress of a family would ever choose to deal with him.

If a woman who had children to educate, and a family to manage, should discourse about all the best plans of education that were ever formed, and the most effectual ways of treating servants, and yet exhibit in her own house a scene of disorder and bad management, she would never obtain the praise of a worthy woman. If a young woman in a superior station of life, should, upon any particular occasion, speak very properly about the propriety and decorum of dress, about the charms of elegance and softness, and the attraction of modest diffidence, and yet show herself always tawdry, and assuming, and loquacious, her very words would render the contrast of her manners the more observable and more odious.

If again, a servant should be able to speak of all the duties of his station; of the attention, activity and observance that are requisite, and yet act directly contrary to them; the people in his own rank would not value him, and no man in a superior

station would chuse to employ him. I might illustrate this subject by examples brought from every state and condition of human life. And if we disregard the general conclusion which all these examples force upon us, we discover a degree of folly, of which we in vain expect that the Almighty, in his course of administration, will not make us feel the bitter consequences. Is there any reason to think that man, as a religious creature, is not under the same method of government which takes place with respect to him as a living, intelligent agent in this world? Is there not all the reason in the world to believe the contrary? How many analogies from ordinary life does our Saviour make use of to instruct men in the truths of his kingdom? But how could they be brought with any propriety, if these two, our business in common life, and our business as religious creatures, differed in the most essential and capital circumstances? Thus he teaches us, by allusions to the dignity and duties of kings, the occupation of hus-

bandmen, of shepherds, of labourers, of masters and servants, of parents and children, of builders, of a company of virgins preparing for a marriage, of dependents receiving the commands of their superiors, and acting in consequence of them. His instructions upon these points frequently begin with these or such like expressions. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain householder. The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto the virgins.* If action and conduct were most essential in the one, but speculation, knowledge and belief only necessary in the other; we can hardly suppose that our Saviour would have run the comparison, and argued from our duty in the one case to what it is in the other.

In the third place; the necessity of joining the practice of religion to the knowledge of it, appears from considering the real and principal objects of our approbation in judging of human characters. It is dispositions, manners and conduct that we chiefly attend to in judging of men; and they

are certainly the most natural objects of attention. This is so true, that even when people have adopted some strange and unaccountable scheme of religion, yet the natural feelings of their heart often predominate in their manner of judging of others; and they forget those ill-founded rules which they had established for themselves.

The wildest enthusiasts, the impious derogators of good works as derogatory to the honour of God, if any-how connected with salvation; in how many instances do they agree in their judgments with those whom they consign to damnation for their heresies? Use all the means possible to expel nature and common sense; yet they will often recur; and neither the worst habit, nor the most absurd opinions will be able constantly to warp and influence our judgments. Let us attend to experience, that guide of human life, and must we not all feel that it is the active conduct, the tenor of the life, the display of the humane, the amiable and the respectable virtues of our nature, that fix

and ascertain the character, and draw forth a permanent and steady approbation? To judge candidly and impartially, we must abstract from a number of circumstances, and attend to a variety of others. If we would become acquainted with the figure and precise colour of many external objects, we must view them in different positions, for fear of a deception from an unfavourable situation, or a false light. It is necessary to use the same precautions with respect to characters. If we hear any man discover much knowledge and exalted sentiments, we approve of him: but our approbation does not depend upon his knowledge and sentiments merely, but upon these as discovering symptoms and indications of a similar character. For if we hear a man talk in this manner, and yet know that he is a tyrant to his wife, or cruel to his servants; will his discourse make the least impression in his favour, or will it not rather add to our dislike and abhorrence? Let the zeal of Peter and the eloquence of Paul flow from the mouth of a preacher:

But if intemperance, or lasciviousness, or cruelty, or revenge stain his character, he will be an object of respect and approbation to those only who are ignorant, or uncertain of his vices. *For enquire, I pray you, of the former ages, and prepare yourselves to search of your fathers. They shall teach and tell you, and utter the words of truth.* In what age or nation was not virtue principally approved? if it is wanting, is not the semblance of it absolutely requisite to procure reputation from the present age, and fame from succeeding ones? Is it not by means of virtue, and of an active faith the foundation of virtue, that those who are celebrated in scripture, and *now dead, yet speak to us?* This is truly the case from the days of Abel, and will continue to be the case while human nature remains the same.

But remove the charm which virtue bestows, and all our praise becomes languid, and all our feelings become dead. I hear with reverence the divine discourses of Jesus: They penetrate my inmost soul. But

the beneficence of his temper, the mildness of his demeanour, the condescension, the mercy, the magnanimity, the heroism which he discovers, still affect me more. It is his conversation with, and attention to his disciples, his active exertion of his benevolent inclinations and affections, his readiness to pour wine and oil into the wounds of the distressed, his acceptance of, and kindness to sinners, his conduct in Pilate's hall, his behaviour at Calvary and on the cross, his resignation under afflictions that were quite overwhelming, his treatment of his enemies, his constant superiority to the world, and his respect for all the divine appointments ; it is these that fix the diadem upon the head of Jesus, and oblige every man who feels the force of all-conquering virtue to bow down before him and to cry, *Hosanna to the Son of David ! blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Highest !*

In the fourth place ; I would prove the necessity of joining the practice of religion

to the knowledge of it, from the general strain and express declarations of the scripture. When a person peruses any book, besides the particular facts it contains, and the doctrines it inculcates, there are some general and leading principles which run through the whole of it, and of which it leaves a strong impression upon the mind of the reader. The two points which the reading of the scriptures appears to me to fix most strongly upon the human mind, are, a sense of the divine perfections and administration, and a conviction of the necessity, beauty and dignity of piety and virtue, or moral conduct in general. These two subjects are often blended together, and are equally pointed out to us in the accounts of the primeval state, the fall and the recovery of man. This matter must be referred to every man's own feelings and discernment. The view however I believe to be natural, because it has often struck me, and an attention to it has always confirmed my first sentiments. Let every one judge for himself. But upon the suppo-

sition of the justice of the remark now made, it is plain that this general impression which the reading of the scriptures conveys, will prove beyond all contradiction their moral tendency. To one who feels this strongly, the producing particular instances and passages may seem a vain labour. But general impressions do not equally strike all; and there is a great class of mankind whose observations are mostly confined to particular and detached passages. Let us then attend to some of the express declarations of scripture upon this subject: and instead of multiplying quotations, I shall take notice only of a few that are most apposite and striking. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, the history of Cain and Abel is related to us in a very simple and affecting manner, and the Almighty is introduced as declaring this eternal truth to mankind, that his favour could only be ensured by a life of virtue and integrity. *And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?*

But if thou dost not well, sin lieth at the door. Upon the occasion of Balak king of Moab sending for Balaam to enquire solicitously how the God of Israel might be rendered propitious to his ambitious and unjust views, Balaam gave this memorable answer, recorded to us by the prophet Micah: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* There is an apposite piece of history to our present purpose recorded of Samuel and Saul, in the fifteenth chapter of the first book of Samuel. Saul, instead of obeying the express appointments of heaven, partly perhaps from avarice, and partly from the view of gaining the hearts of the soldiery, had only destroyed among the Amalekites all that was vile, but had saved the best of the oxen, and the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good. Upon being questioned about his procedure by Samuel, he endeavoured to screen the disobedience of his conduct under a religious pretext, as if all these things had been

preserved with a view to offer sacrifice unto the Lord. The prophet's rebuke is contained in ver. 22. and places in a strong light the propriety and necessity of active virtue above every other consideration. *And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.* The admonitions, rebukes and exhortations of the prophets in general breathe entirely the same spirit with the reply of Samuel. It is scarcely possible to read a chapter of the new testament without perceiving that it inculcates the necessity of joining together the knowledge and the practice of religion. Nothing can be more to our present purpose than the words of our text and some of the preceding and subsequent verses. It is evident that the intention of some of the parables is to teach us this truth. Our Saviour himself only explains a few of them; and in some of those explications this doctrine is expressly maintained. Thus, Matt.

13th chapter and 23d verse, *But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundred fold, some sixty, and some thirty.* We are informed in the eleventh chapter of Luke's gospel, the twenty seventh verse, that a certain woman, struck with the divinity of our Saviour's discourse, cried out, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.* Our Saviour laid hold of this opportunity to inculcate the principles now under consideration. *But he said, Yea rather blessed are they which hear the word of God and keep it.* It was upon the occasion of exhibiting an extraordinary instance of condescension, and pressing an imitation of his own virtue upon his followers, that he ends his exhortation with these words, in the 17th verse of the 13th chapter of John's gospel; *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* The evil propensities of human nature are always ready to discover themselves; and as our Saviour himself speaks in the highest

terms of faith, or a sincere belief in religious truths, and several of the apostles have done the same; some enthusiasts arose who endeavoured to separate the knowledge and the practice of religion, and considered the former as alone necessary. This pestilent heresy gave occasion probably to the writing of the epistle of James; in which he particularly insists on the insufficiency of faith without works.

Faith, says he, in the 17th verse of the second chapter, without works is dead. In the following part of the chapter he shews the necessity of uniting these two principles, and the natural and easy manner in which they coalesce and support each other. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not our father Abraham justified by works, when he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And then he concludes in the 26th verse; For as the body is dead without the spirit, so faith

without works is dead also. Several things that are of the utmost importance to christians may be deduced from this discourse.

In the first place ; it has a natural tendency to give us a practical conviction of the connexion between knowledge and practice. This connexion there are few of us, I believe, that would be disposed directly to deny. But the facts and analogies from common life, and the declarations of scripture, may engage us to attend to it more seriously. Truth is so suitable to our feelings, that, when simply proposed, it is commonly acknowledged ; but the impression it makes, and the practical use of it, depend much upon the variety of attitudes in which it is represented, and the arguments by which it is confirmed. Let what has been said excite us to hear attentively and to do carefully the will of God.

In the second place ; Let us remember that the great design of religion is to make us better men, and that the duties it requires, and the instruction it gives, are all

intended for the improvement of the character. The sacrament of our Lord's supper, for instance, is not a mere formal piece of respect, or a transient exercise of love to God, gratitude to Christ, or charity to men ; but such an exercise of these and other devout affections as truly exalts the mind, transforms the heart, and improves the temper. If upon this occasion you admire and adore the goodness of God in sending his Son into the world, your admiration becomes a man. If you think with gratitude on the matchless love of your Redeemer, the emotion is approveable. Who would be a stranger to such a pleasing affection ? If the sense of your guilt and unworthiness, and the view of those sorrows which they occasioned to an insulted, suffering, expiring Saviour, prompt the tear of penitence and sympathy ; let the tear flow : it would be graceful upon the hero's cheek. But why are all those affections proper ? Because they are suitable to our nature, correspondent to our circumstances, and perfective of our charac-

ters. I approve of them : I beseech you, give scope to them ; but at the same time pray that they may be converted to the improvement of your lives. Preserve the temper they infuse, the manners they inspire, the views they confer in common life ; and shew that the doctrines, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, are the means of raising you up to newness of life, and holiness of conversation.

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